

THE FACE OF
CLAY

H. A. VACHELL.





THE FACE OF CLAY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE HILL

BROTHERS

THE PROCESSION OF LIFE

THE SHADOWY THIRD

THE PINCH OF PROSPERITY

JOHN CHARITY

LIFE AND SPORT ON THE
PACIFIC SLOPE

THE FACE OF CLAY

AN INTERPRETATION

BY HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL

"La vie est un instrument dont on commence
toujours par jouer faux."



LONDON
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À MADEMOISELLE JULIA GUILLOU

J'ai éprouvé un plaisir très grand, quoiqu'un peu triste, en écrivant ce petit ouvrage d'après nature, que je dédie à vous, ma chère amie. Loin, très loin de votre joli petit coin de terre, je me suis senti mille fois saisi d'une vraie nostalgie pour la Bretagne. En Californie, par exemple, dans un beau pays de soleil, j'ai rêvé de votre ciel gracieux et grisâtre, de vos landes pleines de mystère, de vos chemins creux, de vos Pardons, de je ne sais quel charme pénétrant qui remplit Pont-Aven. Avec le brave Islandais de Théodore Botrel, je répétais : "On m'attend au pays Breton." Enfin, après de longues années, me voici de retour auprès de vous. Je vois bien que nous avons vieilli un petit peu, l'un et l'autre ; mais nos cœurs, n'est il pas vrai, restent jeunes encore ? Comme autrefois le vôtre est plein de bonté, de sympathie, et d'encouragement pour vos artistes, surtout pour vos chers "anciens," le mien toujours plein de reconnaissance pour tant de services rendus et pour une amitié si constante.

HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL*

BEECHWOOD, TOTTON.

April, 1906.



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CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	THE PROTAGONISTS	1
II.	AFTER TEN YEARS	19
III.	PONT-AVEN	40
IV.	MICHAEL OSSORY	58
V.	THE MASK	79
VI.	PÈRE NARCISSE	98
VII.	SHADOWS	118
VIII.	YANNIK	138
IX.	TÉPHANY IS SEVERE	156
X.	CARNE	178
XI.	FURIC	193
XII.	LA COTRILLADE	215
XIII.	YVONNE LETS FALL A HINT	236
XIV.	ROPES OF SAND	257
XV.	WIE EINST IM MAI	279
XVI.	REVELATION	301
XVII.	THE UNEXPECTED	326
XVIII.	INTERPRETATION	348

"La Bretagne est la terre du passé. Nulle part les mœurs n'ont gardé un parfum d'archaïsme, une noblesse et un charme surannés aussi pénétrants. Sur ce cap avancé du monde, dans le crépuscule éternel du jour, la vie est tout agitée de mystère ; les âmes sont graves et résignées, et comme sous l'oppression du double infini de la mer et du ciel. Mille signes éclatent, témoignant avec évidence d'une intervention surnaturelle, de tous les instants et dans la conduite des choses les plus humbles. L'homme ne s'appartient pas ; il marche dans un invisible et mouvant réseau de fortes croyances — toute sa vie est dirigée par elles."

CHARLES LE GOFFIC.

THE FACE OF CLAY

CHAPTER I

THE PROTAGONISTS

La mer de Bretagne est femme ; elle n'est jamais la même deux jours de suite ; on songe devant elle au mot de Cladien ; *dulce monstrum.* . . .

TÉPHANY gazed with troubled eyes across the sea. Since ten o'clock of that June morning the wind, blowing fitfully at first, had increased in violence ; the waves, each larger than its predecessor, now crashed with terrific force against the reefs opposite the granite mole which protected the harbour of Concarneau, whence but a few hours previously the sardine fleet had set sail. Some few boats were returning, flying furiously before the S.W. gale ; but the greater number, although forced to abandon fishing, had sought the security of the open ocean, fearing with reason born of experience the bristling rocks of a lee shore.

From all parts of the town women were hastening to the small chapel near the lighthouse, the chapel of Our Lady de Bon Secours.

In their brooding faces, in the shadows of their eyes, Téphany, who was partly of their blood, could read that mysterious fascination exercised by the ocean ; the ocean as a huge amorphous personality, to be propitiated, worshipped, feared, and loved. Out yonder, indeed, groaned and travailed a Titanic Mother, who fed and clothed, who kissed and caressed her children, who sang sweetest lullabies when the midsummer moon hung resplendent above her ; but a Mother, alas ! furious in her rage, unappeasable, jealous, a dealer of cruel buffets, of thunderous words ; an inexorable Force, subject only to the Mother in Heaven, who, robed in the blue of the skies and the silver of the stars, looked down in pity.

Inside the chapel the women were on their knees. One could see little save the white coifs and collars shining out of the thickening shadows. *Ex voto* offerings of grateful sailors and fishermen—models of different craft, waxen legs and arms—all the pitiful symbols of a fervent gratitude, hung above the worshippers. Here and there a taper flared. The figure of the Virgin, crudely painted, garishly gilded, imposed, with uplifted hand, silence and resignation.

Téphany entered the chapel, and prayed.

She was a girl of fifteen, sunburnt of complexion, with very thin legs and arms, but giving promise (to an intelligent eye) of beauty to come. Her features were finely cut, bearing the unmistakable signs of race ; she carried her

small head with a distinction which aroused attention. The eyes were of that varying blue-grey tint to be seen in a field of ripening flax. In certain lights they appeared dreamily blue, suffused with a melancholy never quite absent from the orbs of a Celt ; but if she became excited, they changed into a clear and sparkling grey, intensely vivid and vital. Hair, brows, and lashes were dark umber in sunlight, black in shadow. The mouth was rather large, and full of character, drooping pathetically to match the sadness in the eyes when the face was in repose, curving into captivating smiles when she spoke. She was dressed in faded blue gingham, and she wore a child's flapping sun-bonnet tied with strings under her chin.

After a few minutes, Téphany rose from her knees and went back to the mole, now crowded with factory girls, whose work in the sardine packing-houses was over for the day. They looked seaward, very anxiously, thinking of their lovers struggling desperately with the ever-increasing gale. Such fishermen as had gained sanctuary received but scant notice as they left their boats and climbed ashore. They had escaped. Why waste thought on them ? The men hurried past the girls, wringing wet, and ravenously hungry for their fish broth. Téphany heard one say, as he strode by :

“ It is safer out there, much safer.”

The coifs and collars of the girls fluttered as fiercely as their hearts, for the storm was

lashing itself into a hurricane. Téphany saw tears trickling down the brown wrinkled cheeks of a grandmother. The old woman had witnessed many such scenes, and could count upon the fingers of each hand the gallant sons and grandsons who had sailed gaily away—who had never come back.

Moreover, not a fish had the few returning boats brought home. Foul weather, likely to last for many days, had driven the sardines far down into placid depths, not to be lured again to the surface till the tumult above was stilled. And times were terribly hard in Concarneau. To many a family no fish meant starvation. Yet the women never complained.

“ You here ? ”

Téphany turned ; then the sadness in her face vanished as she exclaimed : “ Oh, Michael, I am so glad to see you ! Isn’t this awful ? ”

“ Yes,” he replied simply.

His face was grave, and in his eyes lay an expression which vaguely frightened the girl. He knew that her father, a painter, like himself, of fisherfolk, had set sail that morning in one of the boats ; and he had not returned. Michael was wondering how he should break this lamentable piece of news to his companion.

“ They say it is safer out there ; but if the wind goes on rising—and in those small open boats ! Oh, Michael, there will be more crosses in the cemetery after this night.”

“ The boats are staunch,” he answered, trying to infuse hope into his voice, and aware

that the attempt was dismally feeble. Then, being but a young man and therefore too ready to disguise his feelings under a mask of irritability, he added sharply : “For Heaven’s sake, don’t talk of cemeteries.”

Téphany held her tongue. But her thoughts fled to a certain cemetery crowning a hill, encircled by a low granite wall, filled with humble graves over which waved long grasses. This cemetery of Nizon, in which her mother was buried, stood out as the largest landmark among her earliest memories ; she remembered perfectly her mother’s funeral, although she was only a child of six at the time. In the cemetery stood a stone Calvary, upon whose granite pedestal she had sat playing with her doll, while her father, day after day, knelt at his wife’s grave. If Téphany lived to be an old woman, would she ever forget the walk, through pleasant fields and woods, from Pont-Aven to the cemetery, the gradual ascent of the hill, the weather-beaten château to the right, and out in the west a thin silver line—the sea ? The cemetery and the sea ! In her mind lurked a mysterious affinity between the two : the one held the dead women ; the other the dead men.

Téphany’s mother had been a Bretonne. Of this mother and her family the girl knew little. Her father had said once that his wife was the last survivor of an ancient race—the de Lautrec of Le Morbihan. Marie Téphany de Lautrec, it seems, had left Vannes,

her native town, to accept a position as governess in Paris. At that time Henry Lane was painting in Gérôme's studio. There he met Quellien, the Bard, an extraordinary genius, the friend of Renan and one of the founders of the Celtic Dinner—that famous Round Table of men of letters. Quellien introduced young Lane to Mademoiselle de Lautrec. The pair fell violently in love, married and, being very poor, decided to live at Pont-Aven,¹ where Gérôme's students had established an art colony. Henry Lane sold a few pictures each year: enough to keep himself and his wife and child in comparative comfort, no more. Then the wife died. After the first six months' anguish, the love which Henry Lane had lavished upon his wife was transferred to the child. Téphany became her father's companion. He taught her English and a little arithmetic. French and Breton she picked up as a sparrow picks up crumbs. Also, he taught her to draw. The other painters at Pont-Aven adored her; and one, Michael Ossory, a young Cornishman destined to achieve greatness (so said Gérôme), became her particular friend and ally. Michael had made a study of Bretons. He recited to Téphany folk-songs, he told her legends, he said he believed in the Ankou and Korrigan,

¹ Si je n'avais que cent écus, je voudrais tenir ménage à Pont-Aven; car c'est là qu'est la plus grande abondance de toutes choses. À Pont-Aven on a le beurre pour le prix du lait, la poule pour le prix de l'œuf, et la toile pour le prix du lin encore vert.—SOUVESTRE.

he touched with his lively fancy every ancient stone and tree in or near Pont-Aven, and—excepting her father—the girl reckoned him the most charming and clever of his sex. So the years passed swiftly and happily. Henry Lane had leased a small house near Nizon, but nearly every summer he came to Concarneau, because his most successful pictures, the ones which the dealers bought, were of sardine-boats and fishermen.

Meantime, with the fading light, the colours of the seascape changed. The afternoon's sun was now obscured by clouds. The amethystine tints upon the water assumed a drab grey. Colour banished, form took its place. The surface of the sea had broken up into mountains and valleys. Even in the pool the water became troubled, and the boats at anchor strained at their cables, emitting dismal moans, like the cries of tethered creatures in pain. These dull, rasping sounds formed an accompaniment to the more clearly defined noises of the waves, which, as the tide mounted higher, began to attack the mole. Téphany and Michael watched the majestic combers, fascinated by their size and power. They broke with thunders upon the sharp reefs, and then, hissing like myriads of serpents, rushed upon the mole. Now and again some stupendous surge, resisting—so it seemed—the attack of the wind, would rear itself up to a terrific height, blotting out with its vast bulk half the sky. But invariably the wind

overthrew it. Falling back in a sublime curve, with the roar of a cataract, it would vanish in a silvery cloud of spray. The women in coifs retreated, laughing and chattering: Téphany and Michael remained. An overpowering smell of crushed seaweed filled the air.

"Here comes another," said Michael.

Téphany thought he was speaking of a wave, but he pointed a finger at the white cauldron of water to the left of the reefs. Through the spray, so thick as to hide entirely the pines of Portzou upon the opposite side, Téphany could just descry a homing boat driven furiously by the wind. Behind her, but never, so it seemed, quite overtaking her, raced the waves. Those in front she climbed superbly, plunging down into cavernous abysses and then emerging light as a swallow.

"It's going to be a close shave," said Michael between his teeth.

The boat was whirled on at such speed that unless the narrow passage to the harbour were hit off to a fraction of a yard or two, shipwreck on the reefs appeared inevitable. An old man was at the tiller. At the exact moment he put the helm over; the boat reeled to the right, dipped her nose into the whirlpool, and flew round the end of the mole within a few yards of Téphany. She could see the grim face of the steersman relax as the wet sails fell with a swish. A boy was cowering at the foot of the foremast. Téphany marked his white lips, his terror-stricken eyes.

But a few minutes later, when the crew clambered ashore, they were laughing, the boy the loudest of all! Téphany noticed, however, that they staggered as they walked, as if intoxicated by joy, and their laughs held the quavering note of men who have seen death at their elbow. Michael nodded to one of them, and said a word of congratulation. The man touched his cap, looking at Téphany.

"Pouf-f-f!" said he. "It is not young ladies' weather. For the rest—we are lucky. The next boat—who knows?"

Téphany shivered. These masses of water advancing and retreating with terrific fury and persistency, this unslaked strength, this monstrous element, so protean in its myriad manifestations, in its infinite complexity of colour and form, yet always the same in one thing: its mad rage, directed against whatever dared to oppose it, appalled and allured her. Each breaker crashing upon the rocks, shaking the mole on which she stood, drenching her with its spray, symbolised for her a personal power, an outward and visible enemy, challenging all who beheld it to mortal combat. She gazed with fervent admiration at the men who had conquered in such a hellish strife; but when she thought of what might have been, she felt that she must run away or faint.

"Let us go in," she said. "Father will be anxious if I stay here any longer. Have you seen him, Michael?"

"Not since this morning," Ossory replied evasively.

"He can't paint out of doors in this weather; we shall find him in the studio. Come on."

Lane and Ossory shared a big attic behind the hotel where they boarded. To this the girl led the way, moving quickly and lightly a pace or two ahead of her companion. When they reached the attic and found it empty, Michael blurted out the truth.

"Don't make an idiot of yourself," he began; "but the truth is your father is—is out there, with the boats. He may have to stop out all night."

The girl gasped.

"Father—*out there?*"

The terror in her eyes made Michael wince.

"Yes, yes," he said testily; "but why make such a fuss? It isn't the first time the wind has blown a bit."

"Michael, you are as frightened as I am."

Michael whispered such phrases as came into his mind.

"Why, you foolish child, you mustn't cry—he's with old Corentin, one of the best. Come, come! Dash it all, I thought you had more pluck. Those sardine girls are braver than you."

"On the quay, perhaps." She flung herself away from him. "But they are crying now. Michael"—she dabbed at her eyes fiercely—"I must go back to the chapel."

"But we can pray here," he objected.

Straightway, they fell upon their knees on the bare floor. The wind shrieked outside, the booming of the breakers never ceased, as those simple prayers went up. Michael knelt upright ; Téphany abased herself, crossing her bosom with trembling fingers, moving her lips, looking upward in passionate supplication. Presently Michael got up, and then a curious thing took place. The young man stared intently at the face of the kneeling girl. At first the sympathy and pity so plainly inscribed upon his features were good to behold. But as he looked these vanished, and a different expression usurped their place. An eager, almost greedy light gleamed in his hazel eyes ; his fingers twitched nervously. Withdrawing furtively to one side, he whipped a notebook from his pocket and opened it. Then, as if realising that he was about to commit a sort of sacrilege, he flushed scarlet. Téphany, half turning, saw the sketch-book at the moment that he was thrusting it back into his pocket. With a sharp cry she sprang to her feet, confronting him with flashing eyes and blazing cheeks.

"How dared you ?" she gasped.

"I didn't dare," he answered, with admiration in his eyes ; "but I was tempted. I couldn't help it. It was a"—he hesitated, and brought out his adjective with a burst of real feeling—"damnable thing to do. Téphany, forgive me. Oh, you poor little

girl, how could I be such a beast? Forgive me—please forgive me!"

She forced a smile, on the edge of tears.

"All right," she answered. "Let's go back to the quay."

She put on an old cape hanging on the wall. Michael followed her out of the attic, down the rickety staircase, and into the street which led to the market-place and thence to the quay. During the brief half-hour they had spent in the studio, the wind seemed to have increased in violence, if it were possible, but the masses of cloud overhead had broken. Between the purple wracks flashed the saffron light of the sun, dyeing the sharply defined edges of the clouds a vivid scarlet; the sea beneath, no longer drab, displayed all the opaline splendours of mother-of-pearl.

"What colour!" gasped Michael.

For the second time Téphany's eyes flared.

"You talk of colour, when men may be drowning——"

"I was trying to distract your thoughts from that," he growled.

She flitted from him, bending her head as she faced the blast, clutching at her cape, which flapped tempestuously. Michael saw that she was making for the chapel. He decided that she must be allowed to have her way. Tomorrow she would be the first to laugh at this terror which possessed her.

The road between the factories and the chapel was still crowded with girls. But

Michael noticed that they no longer knitted ; nor did they walk with arms round each other's waists, as is their custom. No ; the terror upon Téphany's face was inscribed also upon their square, brown, slightly animal countenances.

When they reached the chapel it became obvious that something had happened. Men were gesticulating violently ; some of the women were crying. Michael asked a question. A boat, trying to make the entrance to the harbour, had been driven on to the reefs. Only one man out of the crew had been saved. Michael repeated this to Téphany. At once she became rigid, all the colour fading out of her cheeks and lips.

"Whose boat was it ?" she gasped.

Michael shook her arm, softly and then hard.

"I don't know."

"Ask—ask !"

"Téphany, you must calm yourself. Do you hear ? Why, your teeth are chattering."

"Ask the name of the boat ! If you won't, I will."

She staggered forward, Michael trying to restrain her, soothing her gently, entreating her to be patient and brave. None the less, the terrible fear that gripped her gripped him also. As they approached a group of old men, the word Corentin came to their ears.

Téphany shrieked.

"Shush-h ! For Heaven's sake !"

" You heard it—you heard it ? They said—*Corentin*. Let me go."

She broke from him, running up to the men, who regarded her curiously. The raging wind had drowned her cry.

" Did you say *Corentin* ? " she asked.

To Michael's amazement she had controlled both features and voice. The question was put almost indifferently.

" Yes ; *Corentin*, Mademoiselle. You know him, the old rascal ? *Ma Doué*, he has the luck, that one. He was found clinging to a rock, almost unhurt, and the others—name of a pipe ! "

" The others ? " Téphany's voice penetrated shrilly above the dull roar of the gale.

" The others, Mademoiselle, will be washed ashore when the tide turns. Ours is a pig of a trade, *hein* ? "

Next day Henry Lane's mutilated body floated ashore, and, later, was laid to rest in the cemetery of Nizon, beside that of his wife. It seemed to Michael that Téphany would join her parents within a week ; but she was young and strong, and in her hour of need Michael stood stoutly by her. Amongst Henry Lane's effects was found a simple holograph will, directing that in the event of his death Téphany, if a minor, should be sent to England to his married sister, living in Dorset, Téphany's guardian and sole executrix of the will. Michael travelled with the girl to Saint Malo, and placed her in charge of the stewardess ; it was

understood that her aunt, whom she had never seen, would meet her at Southampton.

During the journey, and while they stood together on deck, waiting for the sound of the bell about to warn shore-going visitors to leave the ship, Téphany exhibited neither distress nor even nervousness. Michael knew that she was suppressing her feelings with a stupendous effort of will. And her determination not to break down seemed to the young man the most poignant thing he had ever witnessed. On his side, also, he disguised his sympathy and pity, and perhaps a warmer sentiment, under a flimsy veil of small talk.

" You will write regularly," he was saying ; " and I shall write. Tell me everything—eh ? You'll be a wee bit homesick at first. It won't last long, that. And your aunt—why, she must be charming, your father's sister, and no children of her own ; she'll spoil you terribly, Téphany ; oh, yes, that is certain."

" Is it ? " Téphany replied. " She's my father's half-sister, and years older than he was. He respected her, but I'm sure he never loved her. They had nothing in common, nothing. And her husband—a dried-up stick, father called him."

" I know they will spoil you, a childless couple. You will forget us."

Indiscreetly he had let slip a word too much. Without warning Téphany replied, with a passion and intensity that swept all barriers aside :

"Michael, don't dare to say that. Forget you? Forget Pont-Aven? Forget old friends? Never!" She began to tremble. "And *you* know, *you* guess, what is waiting for me on the other side; such misery, such loneliness, such home-sickness that I could—and would—drown myself to-night, if—if—"

"If—?" He held her hands tightly in his.

"If I did not believe in God."

As she spoke the bell clanged loudly.

"Good-bye," said the young fellow abruptly, unable to control his voice, which quavered oddly. "Good-bye, dear little Téphany."

She flung her arms round his neck and kissed him. She was barely fifteen; and Michael, ten years older and infinitely wiser, seemed to her the concrete presentment, not of a handsome young Cornishman, but of all that she loved and was leaving. She pressed her lips to his cheek with an ardour which thrilled the man to the core, revealing to him what he had ignored—or, shall we say, misinterpreted—the true nature of his feeling towards her. Was it possible that he loved this child in short petticoats? Regardless of the inquisitive eyes of a dozen tourists, he lifted her up, straining the slight, clinging body to his chest, kissing her cheeks, her forehead, her eyes. Then, as they reluctantly released each other, he said hoarsely: "Téphany, I am going to work, you understand, as I have never worked yet, as—"

"Gangway's being cast loose, sir."

"Good-bye, Michael."

"Good-bye, you darling little thing."

He rushed across the gangway, knowing that tears were in his eyes, not daring to look back for a minute. When he turned he saw the vessel getting under weigh, heard the throb of the screw and the straining of the big cables. But the figure of the girl, standing alone upon the deck, seemed shadowy and spectral. Something within him, stronger than all reason, because, perhaps, greater than all reason, whispered to him that as they parted now, he and she, young, strong, ardent, they would never meet again. Cruel circumstance was putting more than the Channel between them.

Téphany waved her handkerchief and he waved his in return, as inch by inch, foot by foot, the stern of the vessel swung into the harbour. In the hazy west the sun was sinking into an untroubled sea out of a cloudless midsummer sky. The gulls fluttered about the ship, picking up pieces of bread and cake which the tourists threw at them. Michael heard laughter and voices. The tourists were confident of a smooth passage, looking forward to joyous greetings, to a return home.

He waved his handkerchief. The screw of the vessel revolved faster ; then two bells rang out crisply. The engines, till now reversing, began to go ahead. Michael remembered that the boat would pass close to the end of the pier. By running he might get there in time. Racing down the quay, regardless of the

protests of persons whom he brushed by with scant ceremony, out of breath, with flushed cheeks and heaving chest, he arrived in the nick of time. The boat was cutting swiftly through the water just abreast of the lighthouse. Téphany had not moved. Her thin, graceful figure stood out in silhouette against the amber and rose-coloured sky. The intense black of her dress struck the painter as significant, the most striking note in a picture which remained a vivid impression for many years. Téphany gazed at him in silence without moving, without one gesture of the thin arms. Then, with an unexpectedness which almost unnerved him, her lips parted, showing her pretty teeth and the dimple in the corner of the left cheek. There was radiance in the smile with which she rewarded his physical effort, and a joyous assurance in her voice, as she cried clearly :

“ I shall come back, old Michael, as soon as I can.”

“ Yes, yes,” he shouted in return.

Thus they parted, gazing at each other till each appeared but a faint speck, illusive as a reek of smoke. Michael never left the end of the pier till the steamer was hull-down on the horizon. As he turned his face towards the town he was sensible that the long twilight of Brittany had crept up from the land. It seemed to touch with cold fingers the shivering sea. Michael shivered also—and sighed.

CHAPTER II

AFTER TEN YEARS

C'est dans l'âme féminine surtout qu'apparaît la profonde originalité de la race celtique.

TEN years afterwards Téphany returned to Saint Malo. When she left it, the last object on which her eyes had rested was the figure of Michael ; when she came back, what first revealed itself through lifting sea-mist was the islet of Grand Bey, the tomb of the illustrious Chateaubriand.

Then the mist fell ; the islet vanished as if it had been a mirage. A moment later the mist lifted again, and the splendid spire of the cathedral flashed upon the sight, only to dissolve and vanish like Grand Bey.

Once more Téphany felt, permeating every fibre of her being, that sense of mystery which is the peculiar inheritance of the Celt. And for an immeasurable second, so overpowering was the emotion, so long was it since she had experienced it, that she forgot the years and what they had held ; she became the child of fifteen, the little Bretonne, whose mind had held all the superstitions and folklore of the province—and little else.

The vessel glided into harbour, leaving the mist upon the sea to struggle feebly with the rising sun. On the land, and on the water near the land, everything was incomparably clear and warm and fresh. It seemed to Téphany of good omen, inasmuch as the sea was so smooth, so filled with prismatic colour, holding in its translucent depths all the exquisite promise of the rainbow. When she had bade farewell to this enchanted country, the sun was setting into a night sable as the despair in her heart. On her return, the sun rose to greet her with the assurance of bright hours to follow. But she wished passionately that her eyes had first rested anywhere save on a tomb.

Below, in the small, ill-ventilated ladies' cabin, Mary Machin, Téphany's faithful friend and paid companion, was petulantly asking herself a question to which she could find no answer. Why had a young woman, rapidly approaching fame as an operatic singer, cancelled an important London engagement, and then, leaving a delightful flat in Mayfair, declared her intention of burying herself in the wilds of Finistère?

Within the past fortnight Téphany and she had returned from a triumphal tour through Canada and the United States. Téphany's triumphs had been a source of sincerest pleasure to Mary Machin; but she had rejoiced exceedingly to find herself once more in Daffodil Mansions. The size of North

America had distressed Mary Machin. Columbia suggested to her an enormous young woman only partially dressed. New York and Boston were very well indeed, but Milwaukee——! Had not Milwaukee proved herself to be naked and unashamed? Why, at the stage door of the Grand Opera House one hundred and three maidens, lost to all sense of self-respect, had stood in line to kiss Trepoffski, the Polish tenor, who had shared the night's triumph with Téphany. As many youths escorted Téphany to her hotel. They had not kissed her, to be sure, thanks possibly to the presence of an English gentlewoman; but an impudent rascal had snatched her bouquet out of her hand, and divided the petals of its roses among his fellows! One more instance will suffice to indicate Miss Machin's satisfaction in Daffodil Mansions. At Omaha the fact had been given to the world in a headline: "*Machie misses her Muffin.*" Téphany alone addressed Mary Machin as "Machie." And below the pleasing alliteration was a long and very personal article about "The Diva's Dame de Compagnie," concluding with the hope that, lacking her muffin, "Machie" would console herself with—waffles.

Meantime, the vessel had been warped alongside of the quay. Téphany, apparently in high spirits, superintended the disembarking of Mary Machin and the luggage, pointing out, the while, the picturesque roofs rising above the machicolated walls, the gaily dressed

crowds, the various craft in the harbour, objects of interest which only evoked monosyllables from a tired, indisposed (Miss Machin's own word for an averted attack of sea-sickness), dishevelled creature who was thinking of Daffodil Mansions.

"Machie, how cross you are!" said Téphany.

"My dear, I am very cross. Why, in the name of common sense, have we exchanged our pleasant life in town for this?"

Very contemptuously, Miss Machin indicated the Custom-house in which they were standing, the pushing, perspiring crowd of tourists, the officials derisively smiling, and the chaos of piled-up luggage.

"We shall be out of this in a jiffy," said Téphany, "and when we are in our rooms at the hotel, after bath and breakfast, I will answer your question, not before, Machie." She turned to the inspector, who was asking her to point out her baggage. "Yes, Monsieur, yes; my luggage and my friend's"—her perfect accent evoked interest. "We have a great deal, Monsieur: four trunks, two dressing-bags, a large lunch-basket, a small tent, a bicycle and a tricycle, a bundle of wraps, a paint-box and easel."

"Mademoiselle is an artist?"

"An artist? why, yes."

Two porters collected the luggage, which made an imposing pile. The official smiled and shrugged his shoulders. Artists, according to his experience, travelled light.

"Name of a dog!" he said solemnly, "this is all that is of the most respectable."

"Respectable? I should think so," exclaimed Miss Machin. The inspector bowed. He understood a little English, and he had a sense of humour. Smiling at Miss Machin, he asked politely if she had any cigarettes to declare. This question passed unnoticed. Mary Machin was staring at the luggage with open mouth.

"Why, Téphany," she gasped, "do you see that all the labels have been torn off your things?"

"I tore them off myself, Machie. Why do you ask? Shush! Wait!"

Somebody once described Mary Machin as a matronly maid. Strangers always made certain that she must be a happy wife and mother. Maternal solicitude beamed out of her eyes; strange children clutched at her skirts and at her heart-strings; disagreeable babies sat contentedly in her lap. She was small without being insignificant, thin without being angular, pale—except in moments of excitement—but never pasty-faced. She had most lovely eyes of a forget-me-not blue and a delicate aquiline nose. The other features, plain as they were, did not matter, because nobody looked at them. She loved Téphany, and Téphany knew it, because Mary Machin said so fervently and frequently.

"I love you as if you were my sister," she would murmur. Once, in a moment of exaltation, she had added: "I should like to have a

child like you." Then, scarlet and palpitating, she had faltered out, "If an old maid may express such a wish."

Perhaps Mary Machin divined that Téphany was one of those feminine creatures who not only crave for love, but exact also a reiterated statement of the fact. Kind words and looks—Mary Machin's only available capital—never cloyed on Téphany.

At the Hôtel de France two adjoining rooms were assigned the ladies: one happened to be the apartment in which Chateaubriand had been born.¹ The huge bed in the corner kindled a spark of enthusiasm in Mary, but she refused to sleep in it.

"I should see the man," she said.

"If only one could," sighed Téphany.

In this room, after the midday breakfast, which was exceedingly good, Téphany gratified her friend's curiosity. You must conceive Mary Machin no longer cross, nor indisposed, nor dishevelled. The few peevish lines upon her face had been wiped away. She looked charming in a grey dress embellished by violet ribands. Daffodil Mansions seemed far away.

Téphany sat beside her, taking Mary's hand between her long, delicate fingers.

"We have been wanderers over the face of the earth, you and I, Machie."

Miss Machin nodded, as she murmured: "Yes, yes; Paris, dear Paris—then Petersburg. Br-r-r-r! How cold it was that first winter in

¹ La chambre où ma mère m'infigea la vie.—"Mémoires."

Petersburg. Then The Hague—Brussels—Rome, where I had a touch of the fever, and you nursed me so tenderly”—she kissed Téphany and squeezed her hand—“Vienna and Buda-Pesth. It was at Buda-Pesth that foolish young man——”

“Pray don’t mention him, Machie.”

“He tried so hard to drown himself. And it was such a splendid advertisement for you, Téphany. That and the duel at Milan quite established your reputation. I have always said so. Dear me! I wonder what it feels like to have men—such handsome men, too!—fighting about one?” Mary sighed profoundly.

“It made me feel furious,” said Téphany curtly.

“I know, my dear, I know; you are always hard-hearted about men, and I should have been *so* flattered. Yes; let us change the subject by all means. We had got as far as Buda-Pesth—no, Milan. How well I remember those delicious Milanese ices, frozen coffee at the bottom and whipped cream at the top. Then Florence—then the English season, Australia, America, and now—and now,” she eyed Téphany nervously, “and now, my dear, when the world is at your feet, you kick it.”

Téphany rose and paced up and down the big room. An expression unknown to Mary Machin slightly altered her face. Opinions were legion in regard to the beauty of it. Photographs revealed finely cut features, a delightfully modelled cheek and chin, an

engaging smile. But how many actresses and singers can boast as much, and more? The men said that beauty lay in the singer's colouring, and the men were right. Cheeks and lips were rose-tinted: pale rose deepening into carmine upon occasion. In figure she was not too tall, very straight and slender, with the finely rounded throat and bust of a singer.

Mary Machin waited patiently for Téphany to begin her explanations. She knew that mystery lay behind those troubled eyes, and that it would be unveiled in due time. Suddenly Téphany stood still. Then, speaking in a slightly higher and sharper tone than usual, she said abruptly: "Machie, I believe that my triumphs have been more to you than to me."

"That is true, my dear."

"I have seen you wallowing in my press notices."

"Ah-h-h-h!" murmured Mary ecstatically.

"Machie, it is so nice of you to purr because the world has stroked me. But if it stopped stroking—what then?"

A vague apprehension of coming evil set Mary's pulses a-fluttering. Téphany, noting her distress, sat down, and once more took her friend's hand into her clasp. This time Mary became sensible that the fingers touching her skin were strangely hot.

"Téphany," she exclaimed, "you are in love."

"What a shocking bad shot, Machie. "In love—I?"

She laughed, too derisively, so her friend thought. Then her face softened, as she tapped Miss Machin's hand and murmured, "Try again."

"My dear, you are not—ill?"

"Ill? Have I ever been ill? But you're getting warm, Machie. One more guess."

"Your throat?"

After what seemed to be an æon of suspense, Téphany said slowly: "Yes, it is my throat. Don't look as if I were being crushed by a steam-roller. At the worst, and the worst is not likely to happen, I might lose my singing voice."

"Lose your—your singing v-voice?" gasped Miss Machin.

"Not my life, Machie."

"Oh, oh!" Miss Machin began to cry, the tears rolling down her cheeks. Téphany, glancing at her, rose abruptly and walked to the window. For a moment she was wishing, passionately, that she could cry like Machie. Outside a May sun was shining gloriously, bathing all things and persons in a warm flood of light. But a colossal figure obscured the sun for Téphany. She could see nothing save a black-coated giant with piercing eyes, who had said to her forty-eight hours before—only forty-eight hours before!—in cool, calm tones: "The Covent Garden engagement must be cancelled. That is inevitable. Six months hence we will see—we will see."

There was much more, but Téphany remem-

bered none of it. Sir Japhet was the greatest specialist in London; and he confirmed the verdict of the New York doctor, whom Téphany had visited in secret on the eve of sailing from America.

“Oh, oh!” wailed Miss Machin, melting deplorably.

Téphany laughed, flinging back her head with a certain air of defiance.

“I don’t care—much,” she said clearly.

“Eh?” Miss Machin looked up, incredulous, dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief rolled up into a ball.

“I don’t care very much,” Téphany repeated, with greater honesty.

“After that last week, that never-to-be-forgotten week in New York. Oh, dear—oh, dear !”

“That last week bored me.”

Miss Machin held up her hands. By the motion of her quivering lips, one might guess that she was repeating Téphany’s words, “That last—week—bored—you ?”

“Yes.”

“But you have cared for nothing else,” Miss Machin managed to falter. “Your fame, your art, seemed to fill your life ever since, ever since——”

“Go on, Machie. Or shall I finish your sentence? My art, my success have filled my life ever since you have known me, but you have only known me three years.”

“And three months.”

"And three months. And I'm nearly twenty-six."

"And I am thirty-one."

"Machie, you look it when you cry. Now please don't cry any more."

"It's very disfiguring, I know," sobbed Miss Machin, "but I can't help it."

"When I lived in Brittany, before I found out that I had a voice," said Téphany, reflectively, "I was interested in heaps and heaps of things. I must try to find them again—those things. And you must help me, Machie."

Miss Machin wrung her hands helplessly, murmuring, in a choking voice, "What things—where?—oh, dear! oh, dear!—" Did her weakness inspire strength? Téphany's face lit up with a smile. She sat down again, relaxing features and limbs, with an air of accepting graciously ill fortune. The defiance in her eyes disappeared.

"You know that I was happy in Brittany," she began, "and unhappy, frightfully unhappy, in Dorset?"

"Yes, yes."

"But I have never tried to give you details. No. Because there are none. I was overpoweringly homesick. I believe all Breton women are like that. When the peasants leave the province to take service in Paris, they nearly die. I nearly died. What saved me, I think, were some letters from a friend."

"From a friend?"

Téphany hesitated. The habit of silence is difficult to break.

"From a man, Machie."

"Oh!" Miss Machin's eyes brightened.

"From a young man," Téphany sighed. Miss Machin's eyes positively sparkled : she was the most well-conducted and at the same time the most romantic woman in the world ; and the great humiliation of her life, carefully concealed, was the fact that no young man had written letters to her.

"His name was Michael Ossory. Have you ever heard of that name?"

"Never, my dear. Michael Ossory? Never."

"He was a painter : one of the cleverest students in Gérôme's studio. My father, everybody, predicted that he would be famous."

"I know now why you buy catalogues of picture exhibitions."

"Machie, how sharp you are! Yes, I have bought catalogues ; and never once have I seen his name in any of them."

"But he wrote, and, I suppose you answered his letters?"

"Of course I answered them. I wrote sheets, four to his one, till, till he stopped writing. Till he stopped, did I say? Long after he stopped. The hardest time of my life came when *I* stopped."

Mary Machin kissed Téphany several times, very softly ; then, in a whisper, she murmured : "Those letters, of course, were love letters."

"No, not at all. I mean——"

"Between the lines," Mary suggested.

Téphany nodded.

"Why did he stop writing?"

"Why indeed! It nearly broke my heart."

A long silence followed. Looking back, Téphany shuddered, remembering the misery of those days when the link between her and Michael had snapped. Her uncle and aunt, well-meaning and worthy folk, Philistines of the conventional type, were unable to see an inch beyond the trimly cut fence which encircled their modest demesne of Home Close. It seemed to Téphany, then and thereafter, that the business and pleasure of her uncle's life lay in rooting weeds out of his lawn—daisies were reckoned as weeds—in pruning hedges and shrubs, in repeating, not without absurd blunders, what he read in his daily newspaper, and in playing croquet. Now she could not remember whether his eyes were grey, or a faded blue, or a watery green. She thought of him as a spud, *plus* shears, a pruning-knife, a mallet, and *The Morning Post*. Her aunt represented keys. She was one of those careful bodies who, owning nothing worth a passing burglar's regard, make a point of keeping it under lock and key. The books Téphany yearned to read were locked up like the dried cherries which appeared once a week at dessert; the answers to the questions put by the eager girl were locked up also. At

night, every door and window in the small, shabby house was heavily barred. . . .

When it became plain that Ossory had no intention of answering her letters, Téphany wrote to Yvonne, the genial landlady of the inn at Pont-Aven, a friend of Ossory's and of her own, asking for information. From Yvonne she learned that Ossory had left Pont-Aven, nothing more. Téphany would have mourned Michael as dead, but her letters to him were not returned; she knew therefore that he must be alive.

The abomination of desolation followed. Téphany entreated the pity and help of Breton saints. She spent hours, when she ought to have been in bed, praying to Sainte Barbe, Sainte Anne d'Auray, and Our Lady des Bonnes Nouvelles. Then, believing that her own sex had abandoned her, the unhappy creature invoked Saint Yves and Saint Hervé. Bretons, be it remembered, seldom address their prayers direct to the Almighty.

Finally, worn out by self-imposed penance and want of sleep, she gave up the struggle, submitting with piteous resignation to the desire of her aunt that she should join the Anglican Church in which her father had been baptized. Téphany would have embraced with equal docility the creed of Mahomet or Buddha.¹

¹ What Renan says in this connection is worth quoting : “Une fois séparé de son milieu primitif le Breton cessait presque aussitôt de s'appartenir et n'opposait aucune résistance à son absorption dans un milieu étranger. . . . Sa douce foi, son tranquille optimisme est ébranlé.”

Within a couple of years she had changed outwardly into as prim and demure an English Miss as may be found in any parish in Dorset. Indeed, she had come to regard herself as a wild bird helplessly caged, condemned to eat groundsel—with grace said before and after eating it—for the rest of her days. Her uncle and aunt were in straitened circumstances ; they were unable to entertain their few neighbours, and too proud to accept hospitality they could not return.

It is certain—at least, we have Téphany's testimony to that effect—that ultimately the girl would have married the curate, who once, scarlet with bashfulness, offered her a nosegay. But immediately after this thrilling incident, Téphany learned that she was, so to speak, an undeveloped gold-mine. A big, burly, much-bearded Frenchman happened to hear her sing. Comedy followed. The Frenchman called at Home Close, sent in his card, and was ushered into the drawing-room, where Téphany and her uncle and aunt were drinking tea. The Frenchman bowed, turned to the master of the house, indicated Téphany with a gesture, and burst out excitedly : “ Monsieur, Madame, your niece she carry a fortune in her mouse.”

The worthy uncle stared at his visitor and at his visitor's card.

“ I don't know who you are, sir,” he replied coldly.

“ Who am I ? Monsieur”—he struck an

imposing attitude—"I am Bandin—Gustave Bandin! And I—I—say zat Mademoiselle carry a fortune in her mouse."

"The man ought to be locked up," murmured the good aunt. Then, to the surprise of the elderly people, Téphany, whom they had come to regard as a modest and retiring young lady, burst into voluble French. A moment later Bandin and she were shaking hands. Another moment and the piano was open. *On Sunday afternoon!*

"My dear——" faltered the aunt.

"He is the famous French tenor," Téphany explained.

"Mademoiselle will sing ze scale. Do—Ré—Mi—— Sing, Mademoiselle, sing! Have no fear!"

Accustomed to impose his wishes, Bandin dominated this extraordinary situation. Téphany sang the scale twice. Bandin wiped his forehead.

"*Sapr-r-r-risti!*"

Then, in rapid French, he explained to the petrified uncle and aunt that Téphany possessed a voice which it would be criminal not to cultivate; that she ought to study in Paris, if it were possible at the Conservatoire. He, Bandin, was at the disposition of this charming and interesting family. Let them confide in him. He had given his card. He was singing at Covent Garden. He would answer letters, make arrangements, do all that was possible, for the sake of his art—which he adored.

Before his listeners had time to reply the good fellow was gone.

He left behind him, however, a regenerated Téphany, in whose veins the half-frozen blood flowed once more swiftly and copiously. The originality of her strong character asserted its power. We may pass over a stormy month. At the end of it Téphany was despatched to a kinswoman living in London. The verdict of a famous master confirmed what Bandin had said. Téphany possessed a small income of her own, about a hundred and fifty a year. Matters arranged themselves. But the student years of successful artists are seldom worth recording. Téphany worked, and worked, and worked. She had inherited her father's passion for art, her mother's patience. At the end of five years' training came a triumphant *début* at Brussels, and, following this, half a dozen engagements. Then the uncle and aunt, unable to accompany their niece upon her travels, insisted upon a paid companion. Out of a hundred and eleven highly recommended ladies Mary Machin was chosen.

Machie broke the silence.

"I would give anything to know why Mr. Ossory stopped writing."

Téphany hesitated; her trunk was open; on the top lay a small leather desk. She got up, crossed the room, unlocked the desk, and took from it a letter.

"This is his last letter."

She stared at it meditatively; then, in a quiet voice, she read aloud a paragraph.

"In my next letter I shall have something very exciting to tell you. I have found what I have been hunting for years. Between ourselves, my dear Téphany, I believe that I'm going to be prosperous; the broad highway to fortune is certainly in sight. I won't spoil an interesting story by dribbling it out in instalments. Wait for my next."

"Is that all, my dear?"

"I have been waiting for the 'next' ever since."

"It is most mysterious. I suppose that a woman——"

"I do not know. Money parts some old friends. I don't think money would have parted us, although"—her cheeks flushed slightly—"the want of it did."

She put aside the letter, sighing.

"Was he handsome, Téphany?"

"Yes, and very strong. He could pick me up as if I were a baby. Why, when we parted—oh, Machie, I couldn't have believed it possible that I should tell you these things, but when we parted——"

"Yes——"

"I kissed him."

Mary Machin, remembering for what purpose her very handsome salary was paid, tried to look shocked. She succeeded in looking inexpressibly funny.

“ My dear ! ”

“ Machie, I hugged him. And he, he lifted me up and kissed me. At that moment I knew that he cared. He did not say a word, but in his eyes——”

“ Would one want more ? ”

“ Machie, how satisfactory you are ! But, as a fact, a girl does want more. I should have liked him to have written to me that he adored me, as I adored him.”

“ Oh, Téphany ! ”

“ But I did adore him. I’m not the least little bit ashamed of that. He was poor, and very proud ; otherwise I feel convinced that he would have spoken.”

“ And the world would have lost a great singer,” observed Miss Machin solemnly. Then she said sharply : “ I can guess what has brought you to Brittany. You have lost your voice, but you hope to find this mysterious Mr. Ossory.”

“ Machie, you know why I picked you out of a hundred thousand other watch-dogs ? I asked you if you liked my frock. And you said bluntly that you didn’t. And now you have blurted out another truth which ”—she blushed —“ which really I would not admit to myself. I want, of course, to see the country where I spent my childhood ; I want ”—her voice softened to a whisper—“ to kneel once more in the cemetery at Nizon ; but I want, most of all, to know what has happened to Michael Ossory.”

“ Téphany, you are in love with your Michael still.”

Téphany answered gravely, deliberately :

“ No. That is past. But I am curious. I have always felt that the man is alive, and, being alive, how comes it that he is not famous ? ”

Miss Machin pursed up her lips ; she had great tenacity.

“ I do not say that you are in love with Mr. Ossory as he now is,” she remarked austerely, “ but you are in love, which accounts for everything, with the young man who was too poor and too proud to tell you he adored you.”

To this Téphany made no reply. Mary Machin glanced at her. Then, in a different voice, she said : “ Why did you tear the labels off your boxes ? ”

“ Because I have left my stage name in London. I don’t want to hear it again till——” she touched her throat significantly, not finishing the sentence. “ I am going back to Pont-Aven, where I was known, and shall be known, as Téphany Lane.”

“ Oh ! ” Protest informed the exclamation, for Mary was not insensible to the advantages of travelling with a celebrity. Téphany’s stage name opened many doors.

“ Yes,” continued Téphany very softly, “ I go back as Téphany Lane.”

“ Do we leave to-morrow ? ” Mary Machin asked.

“ *I* leave to-morrow,” Téphany replied.

"You will follow two days afterwards. I must have two days alone, Machie ; I feel sure you will understand. I see you do. In two days, left to myself, I shall become, really and truly, Téphany Lane."

She smiled, not forgetting how much she had changed, but sensible that she might change again, that she might renew the tissues, the fancies, the ideals of youth in that remote corner of the world in which she and her mother had been born.

CHAPTER III

PONT-AVEN

Pont-Aven—ville de rénom—quatorze moulins—quinze maisons.

Not many changes had been wrought in Pont-Aven. The houses, built of grey granite, built to endure for ever, seemed to greet Téphany with a sober smile; the familiar water-mills, with their huge wheels, looked not a day older. They had, so Téphany reflected, the sane, mellow appearance of faithful servants who had worked hard and were now enjoying a well-earned rest. The doors of the houses stood open as of yore. Peering into the dark interiors, Téphany caught a glimpse of furniture black with age and smoke, polished by the use of a hundred years. The villagers were busy in the prosecution of the small daily tasks so important to their welfare. The old women knitted, chattering together in pairs; the wives and daughters were washing down by the river, or preparing the simple noon-day meal, or at work in the fields; most of the children were at school. In a window Téphany recognised the face of a friend, Mère le Beuz, who glanced up as Téphany passed.

The dear soul smiled pleasantly, thinking, perhaps, of the fat five-franc pieces which strangers brought to the village, but in the keen, kindly eyes bent on hers Téphany perceived interest only, not recognition. Time had been generous to Mère le Beuz. Perhaps her shoulders and hips were a trifle broader; a few more lines lay upon the brown, clear-skinned face which glowed between the snowy collar and coif; but she still looked strong, the mother, the wife, the sister of strong men.

The sight of this plain honest face gave Téphany a thrill of delight. Then, in the reaction, she compared her own life during the past decade with that of the peasant. The hurry and scurry from town to town, from country to country, from continent to continent, the never-ending competition, the jealousy of rivals, the glare of the footlights, the hot, tainted atmosphere of the theatre, the adulation of the mob. And at the end a physical breakdown, a tiny rift within the lute. Had it been worth while?

The market-place was empty save for a couple of carts standing opposite a tavern. The carts, very long in the body, deftly balanced between high wheels, gave Téphany another thrill. How often she had lain snugly curled up in masses of sweet-scented clover and hay, half dreaming, hearing the tinkle of the bells upon the horses' necks, as these same carts carried her back from the fields to the small house where she and her father lived!

At the east end of the market-place she saw the ancient inn, and at its side a large annexe built since Téphany had left Pont-Aven. Téphany smiled at the old tavern, and frowned at the new. A moment later she was walking up the stone steps, walking, so she felt, into the past, as one strolls into a pleasaunce where time has recorded its sunniest hours.

To the right, through an open door, she could see the dining-room, panelled from floor to ceiling with pictures and sketches painted by her dear artists for Mademoiselle Yvonne. And Mademoiselle Yvonne was still Mademoiselle Yvonne (Téphany had learned this at Quimperlé), and, as ever, the loyal friend of all painters.

Téphany walked into the small office to the left, where a young girl, in the dainty coif and collar of the commune, sat writing behind a broad counter. In answer to Téphany's questions, the girl informed Mademoiselle that as the season had not begun she could have any accommodation, any room almost, she might require. Mademoiselle Yvonne was in the kitchen. Certainly, if one wished to see her, she could be summoned. Téphany asked for a room in the old house, and, without giving her name, wandered into the dining-room and up to a panel at the farther end of it. The panel held a portrait of herself. Gazing at it, she wondered if it were possible that she ever presented so wild, so disordered an appearance. For the first time she experienced an honest

sympathy for the uncle and aunt who had welcomed their unknown niece so coldly, who had stared with such horror at unkempt locks, untied strings, badly laced boots : all, in fact, that Michael Ossory had faithfully reproduced upon the panel.

In a minute, however, Téphany recognised herself, the essential spirit which still dominated her. The eyes, burning out of the panel with such fiery interrogation, were her eyes ; the smile was her smile. Such as she had been she still was ; only the envelope had changed.

A step, not a light one, upon the well-scrubbed floor, warned her that Yvonne was approaching. Ah, thank heaven ! her kind friend had altered hardly at all. Her hair was now iron-grey ; her fine figure had grown massive ; but the shrewd, twinkling eyes, the square chin, the mobile, humorous lips, were the same. She greeted Téphany courteously, but indifferently. Téphany smiled as she returned the formal salutation.

“Who is that ?” she asked, indicating the portrait of herself.

“It is one of my best panels,” said Yvonne.
“But how ugly !”

“Ugly ?” Yvonne frowned, then she added sharply : “Evidently Mademoiselle is not an artist. The sketch is very fine. I have been offered a thousand francs for that panel.”

“You ought to have taken them,” Téphany murmured, still scrutinising her elfin locks.

Vanity hinted that such a terrible witness ought not to be at large.

“Never!” Yvonne’s voice was flatteringly emphatic. “And to me, Mademoiselle, that child is beautiful.”

“Sinfully ugly,” said Téphany. Then, as Yvonne’s kind eyes began to blaze, she burst out laughing, holding out her hands. “Why, Yvonne,” she said—and, although she was laughing, tears shone in her eyes—“you have told me a thousand times that I was ugly, and naughty, and an imp of Satan, and that you never wished to set eyes on me again.”

“*Ma Doué!*” exclaimed Yvonne, relapsing into Breton under the stress of violent emotion. “It is thou, my blessed one. The Saints be praised!”

Téphany flung herself into those sturdy arms, gasping with delight.

Presently, after the first ebullition had subsided, after scores of questions had been asked by Yvonne and answered by Téphany, the latter pointed once more to her portrait. Then, in a voice too quiet and restrained to be quite natural, she said :

“Yvonne, what happened to Michael Ossory?”

“Monsieur Ossory? Nothing.”

Her lips shut with a snap; her eyes refused to meet Téphany’s.

“Eh? But what do you mean by nothing?”

"Just nothing. He has not arrived. He never will arrive. It is a man—*lost!*!"

The finality of the "lost" made Téphany shiver. Looking keenly at the speaker, she perceived Yvonne's fingers nervously interlaced. The rough tone of exasperation in her voice was eloquent of deep regret. Téphany remembered that Michael Ossory had been a prime favourite with the landlady of the Hôtel Yvonne.

"But where is he? You wrote to me that he had left Pont-Aven."

"He came back after two years. He is here."

"In this hotel?"

"He has rooms of his own. He never comes to see me."

"Is he still poor?"

"Oh, no; he has money. He does not have to paint for a living."

Téphany hesitated, recalling old methods, tactics successful long ago. Laying her hand upon Yvonne's wrist, she whispered coaxingly: "You have a story to tell; tell it to me—please do!"

"Never!"

The familiar word exploded.

"Of course I shall call upon an old friend."

Yvonne laughed scornfully.

"As you will. But Monsieur Ossory is not famous for welcoming old friends. Bah! I must be about my business." She smiled frankly. "After breakfast, which we will eat

together—*hein?*—I will show you my annexe, of which I am so proud."

With a wave of her hand she was gone, carrying with her an indescribable atmosphere of freshness and vitality. Left alone, Téphany turned with a sigh to look at another portrait to the right of her own. This was an excellent likeness of Michael Ossory, painted by Téphany's father, shortly before his death. The face, intensely virile, curiously alive, acclaimed Téphany with a grin at once sardonic and defiant. The man seemed to be saying: "Yes, yes; this is Pont-Aven. It hasn't changed, has it? But don't flatter yourself that you and I are the same. We are not."

Outside, the young girl from behind the counter was waiting to show Mademoiselle her room. Téphany looked at her watch. Breakfast was at noon. She had a good hour to spare, and an ardent desire to revisit some of her old haunts, to recapture, as it were, that elusive spirit of the past which she seemed to have caught and held securely only a few minutes before, the spirit put to ignominious flight by the expression upon a painted face.

Crossing the bridge over the Aven, she passed through the village and into a wood, the delicious Bois d'Amour. Here beeches, chestnuts, and oaks grow luxuriantly upon steep, mossy banks sloping sharply to the edge of the stream, which widens out into a broad, peaceful pool, whose surface is only broken by lichen-covered rocks. Below this pool are the

mills, and the rumble of their wheels, when revolving, may be heard above the roar of the weir higher up. As a child Téphany used to think that the waters of the Aven must be loath to leave this enchanted resting-place, the last before the final plunge over or through the sluices on to the mud flats of the estuary. Téphany remembered a certain stone, the sanctuary of an old brown trout. The trout lay there still. Had he defied capture for ten years? Perhaps he was a son or a grandson of the guileful veteran for whom her father had angled unsuccessfully a score of times. He lay, nose up stream, among the weeds, his tail fins slightly moving. A few yards further on a man was painting. Téphany approached him smiling. Her father, and she herself, had painted this bit over and over again.

For the moment she thought she saw Michael Ossory. The man had Michael's tall, fine figure; he carried his head with an air of distinction, as if aware that it was excellently well set upon broad, shapely shoulders. Téphany, however, coming nearer, perceived that the painter was a stranger, about her own age, possibly a couple of years older. Seeing the interest on her face, he raised his cap. Téphany asked if she might look at his canvas. One glance told her that he had great talent. After a minute's talk, she learned his name—Carne. He was a Californian, who had come to Pont-Aven to spend the summer.

"Everybody paints this pool," he said

apologetically ; "but I'm after something different. I don't care a red cent, for instance, about those reflections, glorious though they are. To paint a landscape upside down and two tones lower, and then to dash a few lines across it and call it water, is not my ambition. I want to paint the water itself, its curves, its ripples, and the things that grow in it. Aren't those waving weeds immense ? "

Téphany fanned his ardour, eyeing critically the wet canvas.

" You paint yourself ? " said Carne.

" Enough to appreciate the good work of others. I was brought up with painters. My father painted. He has painted this pool, and so have I."

" It's better than a formal introduction."

" Yes," said Téphany, as frankly. " Tell me, do you know a painter who lives here—Michael Ossory ? "

" Ossory ? I seem to have heard his name."

" He has lived here for years. His portrait hangs in Yvonne's dining-room."

" Oh, the Hermit ; we call him the Hermit. I had forgotten that his name was Ossory. No, I don't know him. You see, I'm a stranger. I've only been here a fortnight. A friend of mine, Johnnie Keats, who is a bit of a gossip, tells me that the Hermit is a 'has been.' "

Téphany asked no more questions. She returned to the hotel, unpacked her boxes, and wandered once more into the small dining-

room to stare again at Ossory's portrait. Presently she discovered another panel of his.

"But this is wonderful," she whispered to herself.

Sunlight fell slantingly on a group of peasants dancing the gavotte. In the background sat the *binious*—the piper and his comrade with a small fife—enthroned upon two huge cider-barrels. One could see that they were piping lustily. The movement in the bodies of the dancers, the expression of vitality and force, the strong contrasts of light and shade, were rendered with unerring delicacy and power. And the man who had painted this lived unknown in Pont-Aven. The why and wherefore of it bit into Téphany's heart.

After breakfast, alone with Yvonne, Téphany was shown the annexe, the big dining-room not used till the middle of June, the salon, and the studios above. In July, so Yvonne said, the crowd of tourists and holiday-makers would arrive.

"I shall stay with you till then," said Téphany.

When Yvonne left her she decided to walk to Nizon to visit her mother's grave and the Calvary. On the morrow she hoped to summon up sufficient courage to call upon Ossory. If he repulsed her, if—ah, well, why should she anticipate a slight, a rebuff at his hands? Passing Mère le Beuz's house she saw the dear old gossip at the same window, knitting and

smiling at the foot passengers. Inside the house a woman was crooning to a child an air familiar to all Bretons, but at that time new to Téphany : one of the songs of Théodore Botrel :

Pour égayer ma nuit profonde,
J'avais trois vaillants petits fieux,
Que j'aimais plus que tout au monde :
Ils étaient si bons pour leur Vieux !
Mais, un jour, l'Océan sournois
Les a pris, d'un coup, tous les trois.
Il m'a volé les petits fieux
Qui devaient me fermer les yeux :
Je dois le haïr ! et pourtant,
Malgré moi, j'aime l'Océan !!!

Téphany went to the window and spoke to Mère le Beuz.

“ That is a new song, very pretty, very sad,” she began, “ but the old songs—you still sing them to your babies ? ”

She wondered if the woman would recognise her, having an absurd yearning that she should do so at once, at the first glance. Mère le Beuz smiled and answered the question, simply and lucidly, telling Téphany of Botrel, of his birth at Dinan, of his upbringing, of his visits to the province after Paris had acclaimed him, of his innumerable songs set to music of his own composition. That, according to Mère le Beuz, stamped him as true bard. She recited the legend of the mystical union between Hyvarnion, the poet, and Rivanone, the setter of psalms to music, whence sprung Saint

Hervé, the blind patron of all Armoricane troubadours.

"Ah, yes," said Téphany, smiling; "you told me that before."

"Before, Mademoiselle?"

"Years and years ago, not once, but a dozen times."

And then again she heard the delightful acclamation, felt the warm handclasp, saw the twinkling eyes beam with affection and excitement.

"But you are tall, beautiful, a great lady. Without doubt you are Madame, Madame la Comtesse, perhaps."

"I am still Mademoiselle," said Téphany.

You may be sure that she was persuaded, with but little pressing, to enter the house and drink a cup of cider. Mère le Beuz presented her daughter-in-law, who had sung Botrel's song, a pretty creature nursing her firstborn.

"And do *you* love the ocean?" Téphany demanded gravely.

Trouble lay in the young wife's eyes as she murmured shyly:

"Ah, yes—after all she gives us our bread."

"She has taken one of my sons," said Mère le Beuz, "and her father." She nodded at her daughter-in-law. Both women crossed themselves.

"And mine," said Téphany, in a low voice. After a moment's hesitation she crossed herself also.

"God forgive me, I'd forgotten that," said

the grandmother. Both women gazed at Téphany with an intense and poignant sympathy.

"You are one of us : I always said so," the elder woman muttered.

"I am Bretonne, yes," said Téphany. "I was born here, and your blood is in my veins."

"Surely, surely," assented the women.

Téphany took leave, promising to return.

The road to Nizon is upon the other side of Pont-Aven, but Téphany wished to take the short cut through the woods and fields : the path she had trod so often with her father, which passes the chapel of Trémalo. She knew every tree, every stone and stile. Presently she came to a delightful avenue of oaks ; upon each side of the way are wheat-fields and apple-orchards. Téphany looked at the trees, stunted, misshapen, many of them, but sturdy and vigorous, deeply rooted in the soil, twisted by a thousand storms, yet surviving them as they would survive others, almost imperishable, honoured in legend and song—the oaks of Finistère. The avenue leads into a wider, more beautiful avenue of beech trees—an approach to the château ; but Téphany, turning sharp to the left, came suddenly upon the small chapel of Trémalo, a miniature church built of granite, extremely old, but in a state of remarkable preservation, and surmounted by a delicately carved spire, an ornament added probably in the sixteenth century. Téphany paused upon the threshold.

A strange emotion filled her. Baptized and confirmed in the Roman Catholic Church, as has been said, she had joined the Anglican Communion. Later, when she left Dorset, she came under the influence of some Rationalists, but their teaching left but a slight mark upon a mind intensely plastic, yet at the same time prejudiced and even obstinate. Téphany listened to the arguments of the philosophers, with the sound, so to speak, of the Angelus in her ears. Let it be remembered that the religion of Bretons is engrafted on paganism. Of this more will be said later ; it is sufficient to mention the fact here because it elucidates what otherwise might seem obscure : the peculiar attitude of Téphany towards the faith of her mother. It appealed powerfully to her imagination, while it left her intelligence not cold, but lukewarm. She had come to consider herself a Catholic in the widest sense of the word ; a daughter of a Church which acknowledged neither Pope of Rome nor Archbishop of Canterbury. Téphany prayed fervently in cathedrals, in kirks, in conventicles, even in synagogues. But since she had left Brittany she had not made confession to a priest.

Now, standing upon the threshold of this chapel, a strong desire assailed her to dip her fingers into the *bénitier*, to cross herself with holy water. She was distressed when she discovered that the *bénitier* was dry.

Téphany entered the chapel. Inside it is paved with rough granite flagstones. Wide

arches, surmounting big, round, whitewashed pillars, support a wooden roof, painted sky blue. Between the roof and the walls is a frieze with extraordinary heads of men and animals carved upon it, all grimacing violently to keep at bay evil spirits. Some ostrich eggs hung in front of a painted figure of the Virgin. The stained glass in a window, very old and very good, deflected oddly the light, throwing splotches of vivid colour upon the stone floor.

Téphany noted these details before she perceived at the further and darker end of the chapel a man sitting upon a rude bench, with his face hidden by his hands. The man sat so silent and motionless that he seemed to have no more life than the figure of the Virgin. Téphany's presence, seemingly, did not excite his interest. This, however, aroused no surprise in her. Some fisherman, doubtless, had wandered into the chapel to pray and meditate. She felt sorry that she had disturbed him. Possibly he had covered his eyes on purpose. Her imagination flared, seeing a fellow creature suffering in spirit, yearning to be alone with his Maker, resenting bitterly, perhaps, the advent of a strange woman. His attitude was one of profound dejection. With a shy, backward glance, Téphany left the chapel.

A few minutes later she was kneeling at her parents' grave.

When she rose, she noticed that the first inscription upon the tombstone had become

slightly worn ; it was fading. With a shock the reflection followed that the few memories she possessed of her mother had become as the dust within the tomb, as the fading writing on the stone :

In Memory of
MARIE TÉPHANY,
Beloved Wife of Henry Lane,
Born at Vannes ; Died at Nizon.
Aged 27 Years.
R. I. P.

The live Téphany, thinking tenderly of the dead Téphany, tried to recall her mother's face. Henry Lane had made many studies of his wife's head, but these he had destroyed after her death, because—so he told his daughter with passionate emphasis—they were caricatures unworthy to be preserved. Téphany could just remember a pure, delicately cut profile, standing out like a fine cameo against the dark confused years of early childhood.

Underneath the above inscription were a few lines setting forth the date and manner of death of the husband, who lay beside his wife.

Téphany turned from the graves to the Calvary upon whose pedestal she had spent so many hours. The Calvary at Nizon is triple, richly ornamented, carved out of granite, the hardness of which has been softened by centuries of rain. It is probable that it was set up after one of those fearful visitations of

sickness which ravaged the country of Cornouailles about the middle of the sixteenth century. During the Reign of Terror the crosses had been pulled down and broken up. All over France madness wreaked its fury upon such sacred emblems. And yet, the madness passed away, the emblems remain, replaced by pious hands, venerated, as before, by pious souls. Téphany, gazing at the stones worn by the feet and knees of countless pilgrims, reflected that another thunder-cloud of madness and violence hung over the province, and she believed that, as before, it would pass, having spent itself, but that the faith, enduring as the granite of these monuments, would not perish, but would rise again, purged, may be, by fiery ordeal, refined, tempered, glorified.

Repassing the chapel of Trémalo, Téphany looked in for the second time ; the man was gone ; the chapel looked strangely desolate and forlorn. The splotches of vivid colour had disappeared ; in the shadows, the figure of the Holy Mother seemed spectral ; out of the frieze the hideous images grimaced horribly.

Téphany shivered as she closed the massive oak door, heavily clamped with iron. Unable for the moment to analyse her emotions, she was none the less aware that, returning to these scenes of her childhood, she was not strong enough to resist the influence which objects considered as inanimate elsewhere

exercise over the minds of Bretons. As a child she had believed that certain springs and stones and trees harboured spirits : powerful to work good or evil upon those who beheld them. In London, Paris, New York, and Melbourne she had laughed at these childish fears.

And to-day, now that she was a woman, they assailed her fiercely.

CHAPTER IV

MICHAEL OSSORY

The stir of fellowship in all disastrous fight.

THE sun was slowly sinking into the woods which lie to the north-west of Pont-Aven as Téphany strolled on to the small quay below the water-mills. It happened to be high tide, and the craft at anchor in the pool were reflected in a surface smooth as ice. Two red, white, and blue tunny boats from Belle-Isle had sailed up the estuary to be scraped and painted. Now that the sardines had come back to Brittany, after a lamentable absence of two years, the big tunnies were to be left in peace. Téphany stood on the edge of the quay, admiring the lines of these boats, built expressly for speed, and sold for what they will fetch as soon as wind and weather have taken the pace out of them. Lower down in the pool lay a collier, loaded to the gunwale, a dismal-looking affair, black within and without, a veritable tramp. Téphany saw that the collier had been a tunny boat; but the masts with the once rakish cant forward were now perpendicular; her rig had been

altered : the racer, in fine, swift as a swallow in pursuit of the big tunnies, had become a sorry beast of burden, cracked of heel, mutilated, a Rosinante among vessels.

A few paces distant from Téphany stood a tall, gaunt man, who looked as if he might belong to one of the tunny boats. He wore the blue overalls and jersey of the Belle-Isle fishermen. What could be seen of his face beneath his cap and through masses of beard and hair had been burnt a dark brown.

Téphany, turning to him, asked in French, if he could tell her the price of a new tunny boat.

"Ten thousand francs," he replied. "And after five years' service you can buy them for a bagatelle of three thousand, or less."

"It's the pace that kills always," murmured Téphany to herself, in English.

"Is it ?" said the man, replying in English. "Is it, Téphany ? Are you sure of that ? I say, not always."

"Michael ?"

"Yes."

"You recognised me, and I, I never recognised you."

They shook hands, staring at each other, smiling nervously. Téphany's first thought was the joyous conviction that Michael wanted to renew the old friendship, or else, surely, he would not have revealed himself. Tempering the pleasure of this reflection was the sense of exasperation that she had not recognised him,

despite his heavy cap and beard. Then again, in Michael's voice Téphany had detected an inflection—as a singer she had studied inflections—an inflection of satisfaction, of an expectation realised.

"Oh, Michael," said she, "I am so glad to see you again."

"If you had come back sooner—"

He silenced himself with acute abruptness. There was resentment in his tone, something far stronger than mere reproach.

"Come back sooner?" She repeated the words blankly, trying to fathom the expression in his eyes.

"Yes; you promised, you know. Your last words were: 'I shall come back, old Michael, as soon as I can.'"

"And you have remembered. Well"—she spoke soberly, as if she had pondered the phrase about to fall from her mouth—"I have come back as soon as I could."

"After ten years!"

Something in his voice angered her.

"Perhaps I might have come sooner, if—if you had answered my letters."

"Forgive me," he muttered, without offering an explanation. "Ten years is a long time. And having held my tongue for nearly ten years, I have forgotten to wag it politely."

Téphany laughed frankly.

"You never did wag it politely, Michael; but you talked a good deal ten years ago. Good gracious! how you used to scold me!"

Who taught you to hold that tongue of yours?"

Before the words were out of her mouth, she would have given much to recall them. She saw Michael wince; then his face set.

"I had no right to ask that," she whispered.

"No, you hadn't," he replied, roughly. "I have not asked you questions, have I? Why, I don't know yet whether you're maid, wife, or widow."

"I'm a maid," said Téphany softly. She felt angry with Ossory, but she admitted his supremacy. He still possessed the magnetism which in the old days had made him a leader in Gérôme's studio.

"You're here," said Ossory, after a pause. "That's the main thing. And I'm here."

"You paint?"

She spoke nervously, afraid now to put the simplest questions.

"Oh yes, I paint. Will you come to my studio and see what I am *not* doing?" He spoke scornfully. Then, in a different voice, almost pleadingly, he added, "Will you come?"

"Yes," said Téphany. "At what time?"

"Ten in the morning. The studio is on the old Concarneau road. I must go now."

"Good-night, Michael."

"My nights are never good."

He lifted his cap and swung away into the shadows. Téphany, standing still, tried to measure the difference between the old and

new Michael, between the man who had held fame in his grasp, and the man who had let it go—the man of whom Yvonne had spoken of as *lost*. Why that dreadful word “*lost*” ? One thing was certain: Michael was still strong. And the word “*lost*” quickened her pulses. If the man, the finer spirit, in Michael, were lost—lost, not destroyed—surely he might be found. What an exciting quest that would be !

He was disappearing when she heard his voice singing. In the old days he had always sung, just like this, and evidently the habit clung to him. But the words and music were strange to Téphany, strange yet fascinating. There was a haunting lilt about the music which brought vividly to mind the once familiar Breton songs.

Thus thinking she walked slowly to the end of the quay, which seemed larger. Yes, it was larger. It had been widened and lengthened ; and half a dozen new houses spoiled the view of the wood beyond. Téphany turned her back upon the new houses and sat down, gazing at the river, which presented an uncanny aspect in the fading light. Upon the other side of the pool stretched the moorland of Brittany, covered with rocks, bracken, whin and broom, scrub-oak and heather : wild desolate spaces, unchanged since the days of the Druids. Through these the Aven rolled silently to the sea.

The sea !

Upon this moor brooded for ever the spell

of the sea. And always, in winter or summer, above the roar of the gale, above the sigh of the breeze, may be heard the voice of the siren calling her lovers to her bosom. The children lying in their cupboard beds behind thick granite walls hear that voice: to its music, however faint, are set dreams, fancies, hopes and fears, prayers and songs.

Téphany looked at the river hurrying past the stony places, but she was thinking of the sea. To her, as to every Breton and Bretonne, the sea was the *dulce monstrum*, which through the mists of past and future stands as Fate.

The long twilight of early summer came on slowly. The Aven once red, then golden, was now silver. Soon it would be lead. Téphany shivered, as she had shivered in the chapel of Trémalo, although the night was warm. For at that moment she apprehended the difference between the old Michael and the new. The river led her to the knowledge she sought. Did not the river flow to the terrible bay out yonder, beneath whose troubled waters sits Death, waiting for her victims? And does not every child of Finistère know full well that Death, on occasion, rises to the surface and glides towards the land? And then the shadow of her grisly head falls where the ancient oaks touch branches across those deep-cut lanes of the province that lead away from, yet always return to, the sea.

Téphany shared that fierce hatred of Death which lurks in the Breton heart. The priests

have never been able to exorcise this belief in Death as a person who may be seen and heard and touched, and the belief, also, in Death's familiar, the Ankou,¹ who gleans the awful harvest.

In the face of the old Michael life had shone conspicuous. Ah! shone was inadequate. Téphany tried to find a better word. Glared expressed more accurately the vitality and energy of the man. It was as if Michael had drunk of the fountain of life, had steeped himself in its vivifying waters, and henceforth had become immune to disease and death. But the Michael of to-night, still strong, still young, and still passionate—who could doubt that?—had the appearance of a man who had looked upon, who had touched Death. Surely Michael had seen the Ankou—and virtue had gone out of him.

Next day Téphany woke to the delicious semi-consciousness of finding herself in some long-forgotten yet familiar and much-beloved place. Before she opened her eyes she heard the tinkle of bells from the collars of the horses drawing loads into the town, the clatter of sabots upon cobbles, the cries of the teamsters, and the sharp crack of their whips. To her nostrils came the fragrance of honeysuckle and new-mown hay, and the pungent smell of the

¹ L'Ankou est l'ouvrier de la mort ; c'est le dernier défunt de l'année qui, dans chaque paroisse, revient sur terre chercher les trépassés. . . .—ANATOLE LE BRAZ.

estuary as the tide swept up to meet the river. She rose refreshed after sound sleep, laughing at the fancies of the previous night, charmed to find herself in Pont-Aven, looking forward with ardour to what a new day might bring forth.

A pretty maid, one of the joyous band of young serving-women whom Yvonne had collected about her, brought coffee and brown bread and butter into the panelled dining-room.

Téphany sat down at the long table. The room was eloquent of the past, although not mute concerning the present : a shrine, indeed, of youthful ambitions, of which a few—how few!—had been realised. Nearly all the panels here were painted by Henry Lane's contemporaries, her *anciens*, as Yvonne called them, and each had its story—which Téphany knew. One or two had served as studies for pictures now famous. Then Yvonne came in, massive, genial, sound to the core, like a superb pippin, bringing Téphany some strawberries from her garden, freshly gathered, with the dew still sparkling upon them. She lingered for a moment whispering a few phrases of information concerning her guests. That thin yellow-faced man at the end of the table was a *littératur romancier*, who had found fame and lost his digestion. He was talking to a caricaturist, a capital young fellow, likely to go far if he left absinthe alone. *À propos*, had her dear child met Monsieur Carne? What a

charming person—and of a cleverness ! Yvonne bustled away as Carne came in, followed by his friend, Johnnie Keats, whom Carne begged permission to present to Miss Lane. The Californians sat down opposite Téphany. She soon discovered that Mr. Keats played the part of Boswell to Carne's Johnson. Although he was older than Carne, he had been at the Berkeley University with him. Short, stout, freckled and prematurely bald, he had, notwithstanding, the attractiveness of a happy and contented temperament.

"Do you paint, too ?" asked Téphany.

"I spoil a lot of canvas," replied Mr. Keats. "So far the happiest and most successful incident in my art career has been the buying of a splendid outfit. I have the daisiest umbrella that ever came to Pont-Aven. Carne, of course, is a genius, you know." He spoke seriously.

"Pooh !" said Carne.

"You are," affirmed the Satellite. "As for me, I'm keen, and I like my own work, which is lucky, because nobody else does."

He laughed pleasantly, adding that a painter's life was a "bully" one, if he had independent means. Mr. Keats used strong Western slang very freely, so Téphany noted.

Then, in her turn, she told the Californians some anecdotes concerning Yvonne's *anciens*. One, a terrible dauber, and quite impecunious, had captured an enormously wealthy heiress ; another, who had never learned to draw

properly, now painted portraits of popes and emperors.

"That's the best thing here." Carne indicated Ossory's panel.

"Michael Ossory painted it," said Téphany. Then she added curtly : "I met him last night ; I'm going to see his studio to-day."

"It's a corker, that panel," declared Mr. Keats.

By this time the room was half full, and buzzing pleasantly. The doctrine of work proclaimed itself, not aggressively as in Anglo-Saxon countries, but melodiously insistent. Outside the peasants were assembling for the weekly market, driving before them the black and white milch cows and their calves, or spreading fruit and vegetables upon rough boards. Presently Carne and Keats and Téphany walked amongst them, talking and laughing. About the booths women were chattering loudly, examining humble wares with keen eyes and restless fingers, commending those they had no intention of buying, depreciating what they coveted. Among the peasants were half a score of old friends. With these, much to Carne's surprise, Téphany exchanged Breton phrases.

"Why, you talk Breton, Miss Lane."

"I am Bretonne," she answered. "Here, at this very moment, I am Bretonne, Bretonnante."

"I should like to see you in the costume," said Johnnie Keats.

"So you shall," she replied. Then, in a graver voice, she added: "I must leave you now."

Mr. Keats expressed disappointment. "Say, Miss Lane, I shan't forget this morning in a hurry. What you don't know about these people isn't worth knowing. You'll pick this up again where we leave it, eh?"

He indicated the Arcadian crowd. Téphany had been talking with a sympathy and feeling which, apart from her success as a singer, made her welcome in many and divers places.

"Why, yes," Téphany replied, smiling. "But," she sighed, "it's not easy, is it? to pick up anything or anybody just where you leave it."

"It's the same market every week," replied Carne.

"Oh, Pont-Aven doesn't change," said Téphany.

She nodded gaily, and walked on alone, across the bridge, past the church, and up the old Concarneau Road. Michael's quarters were in an ancient farmhouse near the crest of the hill. Téphany passed through a gate and approached a grove of walnut-trees which half concealed the house. To her left the ground sloped pleasantly towards the river. The quiet aloofness of the spot struck Téphany at once. Beneath the trees, ferns and moss and turf grew vividly green; here and there huge, grey, lichen-covered rocks gave to the grove character and a certain mystery. As a child Téphany

had listened, open-eyed, to marrow-thrilling legends of mortals changed into monstrous boulders. Michael had had a score of such stories at his tongue's tip. Téphany glanced at the town below, at the river, at the moorland beyond; then she passed through an archway into a courtyard wherein was a stone well. A farmer and his wife occupied the lower half of the house, and their little children were playing near the well. Just inside the door, at the foot of a winding stone staircase, stood Michael.

"Mind your head," said he, not offering to shake hands, and leading the way upstairs.

"And you mind your manners," she retorted, trying to speak with the lightness of other days.

He pulled off his cap, shamefacedly, growling out apologies. Téphany laughed, for the spirit of the market-place still possessed her.

"I'm only joking, Michael."

"Here's where I live, Téphany."

He accented ironically the word "live." It might be assumed that elsewhere Michael existed in a merely vegetable way. Téphany looked about her with keen interest. The studio, of a pale grey in tone, with a ceiling slightly darker than the walls, was surprisingly large and well proportioned. An old oak dresser, with the date 1624 carved on it, displayed some curious figures of Breton faïence, rudely modelled, coarsely painted, and yet informed with a simple, primitive grace and

charm ; upon the walls were innumerable charcoal sketches, names, scraps of verse, the memorials of previous tenants, some of them executed with amazing spirit and cleverness ; in a corner, near the fireplace, stood a sofa and a bookcase full of books. Téphany's quick eye noted that the pens on the writing-table were rusted and broken ; the ink had dried up in its pot ; obviously Michael wrote no letters.

"Ah!"

The exclamation fell sharply from Téphany's lips. Upon an easel in the centre of the room was the study of a woman, admirable in tone, technique, and breadth of treatment.

"You remember that?" said Michael.

"Remember it?"

"Yes ; I painted it years ago."

"Why, so you did. Yes, I do remember it."

Ossory laughed.

"I keep it to show some idiots what I can do, if I try. Gérôme liked that."

"I should think he did. It's magnificent."

Michael turned aside to pull out a bundle of canvases.

"These are sketches, nothing more. I expect you to be disgusted. Perhaps you will see passages : a bit of colour here and there—"

Muttering to himself he untied the string, and submitted the first sketch.

"I go for colour," Michael explained.

"You used to say that art was the expression of individuality."

"Fancy your remembering that! I talked a lot of rot, but this is the expression of failure."

"Some of it is wonderful."

"You think I'm an impressionist?"

"Father used to say you were such a stickler for the truth."

"Truth? Truth?" He laughed harshly. "Honest work? That means staring at a thing till you're dazed and colour-blind. That means," he grew excited, waving his thin hands, "seeing the outside, the mere rind, and letting the great thing escape."

"Not necessarily."

"I speak for myself. I paint to please myself. I sell nothing. I've enough to live on. I won't show you any more of my stuff. I never do show it."

"I want to see everything," said Téphany eagerly. "And if you think I'm going to condemn your methods because I don't quite understand them, you do me an injustice. Few have the courage to be pioneers. You are an honest artist, Michael."

But as she spoke she looked at the painter's face, not at his picture. Certainly Michael had great qualities. He made no concessions, flouted compromise, and he had something of the air of a martyr. How thin and worn he was, poor fellow!

"You'll like this better, Téphany." He pulled out another canvas.

"Yes, yes ; I do, I do."

The second sketch was a study of wind meeting tide. Half of the canvas was scraped out : a mere blur of dirty colour, but a great wave, with all the force of the Atlantic behind it, rushed roaring—one could almost hear the roar—against its furious enemy, a north-west gale. The wind, one could see, rent the top of the wave in twain and whirled it skyward in columns of spray, but the mighty volume of water rolled on, irresistible, omnipotent. The impact of these two tremendous forces had been transferred to the canvas by the hand of genius.

"I've seen that," said Michael, "ten thousand times, and I painted it here upon a sunny midsummer's morning."

He whipped it from the easel, deaf to Téphany's protest, and substituted another bit in startling contrast. Upon a stretch of sand a wavelet was breaking. Michael repeated de Musset's delightful lines :

Où la mer vient mourir
Sur la plage endormie.

The heavy languorous atmosphere, the calm after the storm, the ineffable peace of the picture, were soothing as a lullaby ; but out of the placid surface of the sea bristled three splintered masts ; upon the soft, golden sands lay wreckage and a corpse.

Téphany thought of the Ankou, whose grisly shadow dwelt in Michael's eyes.

"And I painted that, my dear Téphany, when a gale was raging."

She saw that half of the canvas was cruelly hacked by a palette knife.

"This might have been a great picture, Michael. It *is* a great picture."

The painter frowned, snatching it, as before, from the easel. Then he showed other sketches, more or less mutilated, as if the man had worked in futile rage against abysmal differences between promise and performance. Téphany noted with surprise that all were seascapes.

"Don't you paint the figure?" she asked.

"A male model or two, now and then."

"Now and then?"

"Just to keep my hand in."

He had sat down, and was filling a pipe. The keenness had died out of his face. Téphany saw other canvases leaning face against the wall.

"May I look at those?"

"If you like."

She turned them over, one by one. The expression of curiosity upon her delicate face deepened. Here, in Finistère, where the women were such ravishing subjects, Michael Ossory chose to paint men only. Téphany was about to ask the reason of this singular abstention, when she happened to find a last canvas, half hidden behind a big chest. She glanced at it, raised her brows, and turned to Michael, who had closed his eyes; he might

be asleep. From his pipe, which he held loosely in his hand, a spiral of blue smoke ascended. Téphany set the canvas upon the easel and examined it attentively.

In a courtyard, cool and grey, stood a young girl in a coif not familiar to Téphany. She wore the plain black dress with velvet bands of the peasant, and a filmy lace apron. One hand rested upon a granite water-trough, the other upon her hips. The whole was a study in half-tones so subtly blended, so cunningly manipulated, that the primary colours—the yellow of the girl's hair, the red of her lips, the blue of her eyes—seemed to shine through them, as a rainbow may shine through a thick mist. The child was a child of the sun, lingering for a few minutes in the shade. These points, however, revealed themselves later. At the first glance Téphany could see nothing save the extraordinary delicacy and grace of the child's face. The pose of the head upon the slender throat, the exquisite modelling of the cheeks, the perfection of proportion, drew from her an exclamation of astonishment. At once Michael jumped to his feet. Then, seeing the canvas on the easel, an expression of surprise, anger, and suffering distorted his face. In a cold voice he demanded: "Where did you find that?"

"Behind the chest."

"Not in it?" Without appearing to wait for Téphany's "No" he crossed the room, and

tried the lid of the chest. It remained fast, seemingly locked.

"I beg your pardon," said Téphany gravely.

Michael's face cleared. He approached the easel, and stared at the picture. Then he asked abruptly: "Now you have seen it, what do you make of it?"

"Is it painted from life?"

"No. As a matter of fact, it is more or less faked."

"Faked? I can't believe that. If you were anybody else, Michael, I'd entreat you to exhibit it."

"What do you make of it?"

Anxiety lent to the question significance.

"I say it's magnificent. But the child? Did she come to you in your dreams?"

"Yes, in my dreams. Now, tell me"—his voice became very insistent—"is there happiness in that face?"

Téphany hesitated.

"Why, yes," she said presently. "Well, I am not sure. The shadows have touched her; she's in shadow, and I don't seem to see her quite plainly; not yet—" she peered into the picture. "Happiness, you say? She has been happy, but—"

"Go on—"

"She looks out of the shadow—"

"Into the sun?—"

"I don't know; I—"

"Speak out, candidly!"

"She looks into deeper shadow. Yes, I'm

sure of that. Oh, it's terribly sad, this face. You present pathos. Michael, it's the most pathetic thing I ever saw."

"The light is bad," said Michael.

He pulled up a blind and altered the position of the easel.

"There, that's better. Look again!"

Téphany looked.

"I declare the expression has changed," she said, after a long pause. "I seem to detect a smile."

"What sort of smile?"

"It is derisive."

"What? A child's smile—derisive?"

"My dear old Michael, the derision in a child's smile is the most amazing thing in the world. And you've painted it."

"No, no; it's not derision."

"It may be wonder. If this child lived—if she grew up——"

She paused. Michael had turned his back, and was looking out of the window. Téphany divined that he was profoundly moved; in pain possibly. She divined also that he wished her to go, to go—and to come back. Obeying this instinct, she moved to the door.

"When may I come to see you again?" she asked, pausing on the threshold of the studio.

"Come to-morrow, same time." His voice was harsh and strained. "I shall have something to show you, something I wish you to see."

Téphany descended the rickety stairs, and plunged with relief into the sunshine of the street below.

Once outside she breathed more freely, marshalling her unruly thoughts into something which at least approximated to order. Michael, she decided, was in straits, whirling to what? His nights—he said—were never good.

Ascending the stairs which led to her room she met Yvonne, who stopped for a word.

"Ah, my child," said she, shaking her capable forefinger, "it is time indeed you came back here. You are thin—much too thin; but I, mark you, am going to put on sound flesh."

"I saw Michael Ossory this morning and last night."

She beckoned the woman who had befriended both Michael and herself into her room.

"What is the matter with him?" she asked.

Yvonne shrugged her shoulders.

"He looks horribly unhappy. And there is something on his mind. One might help him, if one had a hint——"

Yvonne's face became wooden. Then she said sharply: "My child, I do not meddle with what does not concern me."

"There never was a woman like you, Yvonne. All the same, tell me this—I'm not a sieve, you know: Did he ever paint a child, a girl, in what used to be the old courtyard behind this house?"

"Eh?"

Téphany repeated her question, adding:

"I recognised the courtyard at once, and I should have recognised the child's face, had I ever seen it."

"What was the child like?"

Téphany began to describe it; then, founder-ing in a sea of vague adjectives, she clutched at a piece of paper and a pencil.

"There, there," said she, "that will give you a faint idea, eh?"

Yvonne's face softened, then it became rigid, as she returned the sketch.

"I never saw that child in my life."

"Nor in your dreams?" Téphany hazarded, remembering Michael's words.

Yvonne flushed scarlet as she said angrily: "I have given you good advice in the past. The less you see of Monsieur Ossory the better."

She bustled out of the room, frowning and growling to herself.

"One thing is certain," Téphany reflected. "Michael has offended Yvonne. She hates him; I saw hate in her kind eyes; and there was a time when she would have cut off her hand to do him a service." Then she remem-bered the sudden flush. "Good gracious!" she muttered, "the face of that child *has* come to Yvonne in her dreams."

CHAPTER V

THE MASK

*J'entendis le rossignol de nuit
Chanter le chant du Paradis !*

AFTER another delightful afternoon spent in rambling amongst old haunts, Téphany slept as soundly as before; but her sleep was not dreamless. The face in the picture came to her—as she had felt that it had come to Yvonne—with the strange smile curving the lips that shone red out of the shadows. The dream was singularly vivid, but not disagreeable. The child, it is true, eluded her, played hide-and-seek with fancy, luring her on to follow and then fading, vanishing. . . . Upon one of these occasions, even as Téphany grasped the shadow, a strain of music floated to her ears, and a voice, the voice of the child (she never doubted that), sang sweetly and clearly three verses of a song. When she awoke, Téphany could remember nothing save the sweetness and clearness of the child's voice. In a dream these crystalline notes had filled her with delight; awake, the pleasure lingered, suffusing itself genially, like the glow which succeeds a fine sunset.

"In my dream," said Téphany, "she was calling me."

When she presented herself at the studio, Michael opened the door. From his appearance it was quite evident that he had passed a wretched night. The sun fell upon a haggard face, dishevelled hair, and tired eyes.

"You are late."

"It is just ten," said Téphany gravely.

"Well, come in, come in."

The irritation in his voice, the restless hands, the weary eyes, deeply impressed Téphany. Michael crossed the studio and disappeared into a small room beyond, a sleeping-chamber. Téphany felt an absurd wish to run away. She wanted to see the sun, to feel the strong west wind upon her cheek, to hear the familiar chatter of the street. . . .

Michael came back, carrying something white. At once his face reminded Téphany of another face. A scene took form out of the shadows of memory. She beheld the aisle of a great Gothic cathedral; the aisle and little else save the twinkling lights of the high altar beyond; for it was night. The huge pillars soared into mysterious darkness, out of which floated the notes of an organ. Far away the choir chanted a Latin hymn: a solemn invocation. Presently, out of the darkness, light drew near and nearer: a procession of priests and acolytes bearing tapers. Last of all came the arch-priest, carrying a crucifix in his hands. The crucifix contained a precious and holy

relic. Upon this the gaze of the man who bore it was fixed in an expression so rapt that Téphany had felt impelled to turn aside her eyes.

And now, in the cool grey shadows of the studio, Téphany saw the same concentrated expression upon the face of her old friend.

“Take it !”

Téphany held out her hands to receive a plaster mask.

“Why—why—this”—she examined it attentively—“this is the child grown into a woman. What a lovely creature !”

“Ah, you see it, the beauty, the perfection of form. Well, what else do you see ?”

“You must give me time.”

Téphany stared at the mask, while Michael gnawed his moustache.

“There’s a look of *La Gioconda*.”

“Ah ! you have recognised that. I’m glad I asked you to come. If you see that——” he broke off abruptly, and then continued : “Turn it very slowly, so that the light falls on the left side of the mouth. There, there ! Now she looks different, eh ?”

Such anxiety underlay the sharp “eh” that Téphany hesitated before she replied slowly : “I don’t see *La Gioconda* now.”

“The smile is still there ?”

“Yes, but it’s the smile of the child—a derisive smile.”

Michael made no reply. Téphany, glancing keenly at him, said interrogatively : “She is a

girl?" As Michael said nothing, she continued, speaking half to herself: "One cannot mistake those contours, and the plaster always shows the lines, unless—I take it for granted this is an original mask, taken from—yes, I am sure of that—taken from a living face."

"You are sure of that?"

"No; not quite sure; one would like to know. Where did you get it?"

"In Paris," Michael answered curtly; then he added, in an indifferent tone: "After all, if you have seen *La Gioconda*, you have seen what I wanted you to see. I am satisfied. You had better bid me good-bye."

"Good-bye?"

"I cannot give you my confidence, Téphany. It would be well for me if I could."

He spoke so sadly that Téphany felt her curiosity oozing from her, leaving behind the desire to befriend and comfort an unfortunate fellow-creature. Her voice had a warmer tone as she murmured: "I do not ask for your confidence. Give me as much or as little of it as you please. But if I can help you in any way, let me do so." She paused; then she touched Ossory's shoulder, and, with something of her old expansiveness and sympathy, burst out: "You want a friend, Michael; take me."

"Without explanations?"

"Certainly."

Michael hesitated.

"I'm sure you want a friend." Téphany repeated.

"Want a friend? My God!" He controlled himself with a tremendous effort. "Yes, I want a friend," he repeated quietly. "Why, the mere sight of one, after these years—" He added almost in a whisper: "I had made up my mind not to speak. Yesterday, in the chapel at Trémalo—"

"You—you were in the chapel?"

"Yes; I saw you and recognised you. Well, I accept your offer of friendship, Téphany. While you are here—you will be leaving in a few days, I suppose?" She made no answer, and he continued: "While you are here, think of me kindly, and come to see me sometimes."

She held out her hand, which he gripped. As she left the studio, the last thing she saw was Michael standing with his profile sharply defined against the grey wall, staring at the mask.

Next day Mary Machin arrived. With her came an air, an atmosphere, of comfortable English conventionality which Téphany inhaled greedily. Mary, however, was not quite so enthusiastic about Pont-Aven as she might have been. When Téphany led her into the Bois d'Amour and said, "There! isn't it perfectly beautiful?" Machie stuck out a dubious under lip. She had seen prettier spots in England and Wales. And the Brittany landscape was—well—disappointing. The best parts of it, for instance, reminded her of Scotland with the tops of the hills sliced off.

"I should like to pinch you, Machie," said Téphany viciously.

"My dear"—Machie smiled pleasantly—"I know that this is the loveliest spot in all the world to you. Why, I used to think St. George's Road, where we lived when I was a child, the finest street in London." Then, with a change of voice and manner, she murmured, "I suppose you have heard nothing of Mr. Ossory?"

Her soft blue eyes met Téphany's with a deprecating interrogation.

"Michael Ossory is living here," Téphany replied.

"Oh!"

"He has changed a great deal; in fact, I did not recognise him."

"Téphany!"

"Changed in every way," said Téphany, almost with violence. As Machie slipped her hand into hers, she added quietly: "It was not money; he appears to be fairly well off: a woman came between us."

"Oh!" said Machie again. "Has there been an illumination?"

"A few sparks; but now, Machie, the flame is out, quite out, you understand. We have met, and we shall go on meeting, as friends."

"You have told him of your success as a singer?"

"Not a word. How could I? As an artist he has failed."

Téphany closed her lips resolutely as Machie leaned towards her and kissed her in silence.

A couple of days passed without incident. Carne and his friend Keats made themselves agreeable after the easy and free fashion of Bohemians, and certain expeditions to "Pardons" were planned.

"I had no idea there was so much to do and see here," Mary declared.

"To see?" Téphany smiled. "Ah, well, Machie, the things really worth seeing in Brittany are not easy to see. It takes years to see them."

"And some of them I don't want to see," Mary declared with emphasis. "Last night, when you were writing, those Americans told me ghost stories. Positively, I was frightened out of my life when I went to bed. Mr. Carne says that Fantec, the porter, saw his dead wife regularly every night for a week."

"Fantec is too fond of cognac."

"Perhaps he was driven to the abuse of it," said Mary solemnly. "My dear, I must tell you his story. Perhaps you know it?"

Téphany shook her head. It seemed that Fantec had lost, some six months previously, a young and pretty wife. Upon her death-bed she had made her husband promise to bury with her the clothes she had worn upon her wedding-day—a not uncommon request. Such clothes are beautifully fashioned, particularly the aprons, which descend as heirlooms from mother to daughter. Fantec's wife owned

such an apron, a gossamer cambric affair, exquisitely embroidered with silk. Fantec could not bring himself to sacrifice this valuable garment. Accordingly, he substituted an inferior apron. That night the spirit of his wife stood beside his bed, and pointed a menacing finger at the ancient oak *armoire* where the apron lay hid. Fantec endured these visitations for a week; then, crazy with terror, he obtained leave from the authorities to exhume the coffin. The apron was placed in it. The spirit ceased to visit him.

Mary sighed as she finished her story. "The worst of it is," she added, "that I think the whole thing rubbish, and yet here, somehow, one is impressed by it."

"You have felt that?" Téphany murmured.

Mary blushed. "My dear," she whispered, "I was so absurdly impressed by it that I—fool that I am—asked Fantec this morning if the story were true. He confirmed every word of it, most solemnly, and showed me the chest where he had hidden the apron. He also confided to me—this is between ourselves—that he is so frightened of being alone at night that he is going to marry again."

"Oh, Machie!" said Téphany, "I am glad I brought you here. Whenever I feel nervous I shall ask you to tell me about Fantec."

That afternoon, while Mary was sketching one of the mills below the bridge, Téphany climbed once more the stairs leading to

Michael's studio. He was painting furiously, working without brushes, using a couple of palette knives. He jumped up at the sight of his visitor.

"I thought you had chucked me," he said.

"Perhaps I wanted to let you cool down," she suggested.

He began to talk of his work, with an animation and fluency which reminded Téphany of the old days. Presently, wishing to amuse him, she told him about Mary Machin and Fantec. When she ended with a gay laugh, he growled out :

"Perhaps she did come back." Then, without noticing her raised eyebrows, he added : "For that matter, I have had experiences, more than one. There was the case of Harbottle. He was at Gérôme's with me, my intimate friend. We shared the same rooms. One summer Harbottle went to Norway, and I to Gretz. I give you my word that I was painting hard, not thinking of my friend. But I woke in the middle of the night and saw his face."

"Yes," said Téphany, thrilled more by the narrator's manner than by his words.

"I saw his face distinctly. It was—hideous. Swollen, discoloured, with ejected eyes and protruding tongue. Next morning I told myself that I had been tormented by a nightmare. The fact remains that, four days before I saw the vision, my poor friend met his death by drowning, and at the moment, approxi-

mately, when his face was seen by me, the body was found in a fiord by the search party. . . .”

Téphany said nothing; Michael concluded harshly, imperiously, as if he wished to impose his beliefs on his companion:

“I say that the dead are continually about us. More, their presence affects us for good or ill. They inspire great thoughts, great deeds sometimes, and sometimes, Téphany, they inspire crime.”

“Michael, you oughtn’t to think of these things. I’m sorry I told you about Fantec, I——” She ceased speaking, for Michael was not listening. He had hurried into the inner room, and returned with the mask in his hand.

“Forgive me,” he muttered. “You know that I have always been the bond slave of my impulses. The other day you saw derision in this face; now I want you to examine it in different lights. Sit where you are. Now—now—what do you see?”

His anxiety struck Téphany as being pathetic. She remained silent, gazing at the white plaster, no longer quite white, she noticed: slightly yellow, as plaster becomes when exposed to the air and sunshine. Téphany jumped to the conclusion that the cast had been taken many years before. The girl, if she were still alive, must now be a woman; and if she were dead——

Michael’s voice interrupted her thoughts. “I’m glad you’re taking time to answer my

question. I want you to take time. As a favour to me, interpret, if you can, that expression."

Téphany blinked and rubbed her eyes. The mask, as she now saw it, appeared radiant. This, of course, was an effect of light and shadow. Without speaking, she rose and stared at the face from half a dozen different points of view.

"It's wonderful," she exclaimed.

"I will tell you this," he said abruptly. "The girl from whose face this was taken is dead."

"Poor thing!" Téphany murmured.

"Why do you say that?" He was becoming excited. "Why do you say that, Téphany? It may be better for her that she is dead. She died young." He hesitated, struggling, evidently, between a passionate desire to speak and a reserve which he deemed inviolate. Finally, the words broke from him, "It is a death mask, Téphany. Do you understand?"

"Oh! I could not have believed it possible, because—"

"Yes, yes—"

"Because even the plaster seems to be alive. The expression has changed again and again in the last two minutes. What do I see?" His excitement, so contagious, so overpowering, communicated itself to her. "I see a sadness which clutches at the heart. She must have suffered—cruelly—*Michael!*"

The suffering she spoke of seemed to have

transferred itself from the face of the dead girl to the living man. Téphany was sensible that she had plunged a knife into the heart of her old comrade. So distressing was this conviction that she dropped back into her chair, quivering with pity and dismay. Michael's face hardened.

"You have intuitions," he said slowly. "I knew it."

"But I wouldn't hurt you for the world."

"You have not changed, Téphany."

The blood rushed to her throat and cheeks. She felt the warm tide mounting to her head, choking and strangling her. He had loved her once; and she had loved him. But he had changed; and so had she. The blood ebbed again. Michael, at all events, had not perceived her confusion, for he had turned his back. At the moment he seemed to be busily engaged in criticising his unfinished sketch, as if he were trying to fetter a rebellious mind to the pigments on the canvas. When he turned round he had become cool and calm. Téphany attempted to salve the wound she had made.

"I spoke of sadness and suffering, Michael; but from here, where the light is best—and—and—plays least tricks—I affirm, yes, affirm—positively"—she spoke deliberately, picking her words as a traveller may pick the stepping-stones in a raging torrent whereon he sets his feet—"that joy dominates the anguish. Oh, yes, it is unmistakable. At this moment the

face glows with peace, patience, one might almost say triumph."

At each word the man, steadfastly regarding her, seemed to grow younger and happier. The change was so startling as to be uncanny. Again Téphany asked herself the inevitable question : "What was this girl to Michael ?"

"Thank you," he said quietly. Then, lifting the mask very tenderly, he carried it back into his bedroom.

When he returned he displayed an interest, for the first time since they had met on the quay, in the change which the years had wrought in her.

"You are no longer the ugly duckling," he said. "And the fine bird wears fine feathers. Has Miss Lane been left a fortune? Téphany of Pont-Aven was poor."

"I have enough for my wants," she replied indifferently. Desiring to tell him everything, she was sensible that a recital of triumph would destroy the frail thread which still held them together. Let him suppose that she had inherited rather than earned the wherewithal to buy pretty frocks and hats. He began to talk, rather disconnectedly, of life in England as it is lived in the country by people of moderate means. Téphany had heard him hold forth on this subject before. She smiled to notice how little his views had changed.

"I complain of the stupidity of the men and women," he said. "As for the men, I suppose it's a physiological fact that the blood

which ought to nourish the cells of the brain is used up in digesting their enormous meals. I thought of living again in England after——” He hesitated, stammered slightly, and began another sentence. “I t-tried it for a time, but I had to come back here. But I go away in the summer. A month from now Pont-Aven will be overrun by trippers. Throw a stone out of this window and you will hit not a Breton, but a Briton.”

“Did you try living in London?”

“London? Bah! I can’t breathe in London. The struggle, the ignominious struggle for existence, chokes me. The ugly, unhealthy faces torment me. The failures are whining; the few successful ones grin superciliously. Oh, those successful ones! What a fool I am to talk like this! You are saying: He has failed; he is whining; he envies those he abuses.”

“No, no,” said Téphany gently.

“I might have succeeded,” Michael continued; “it is my own fault—remember that—my own fault that I am obscure. But if I had succeeded, if I were rich, I think I should live here in Brittany, because I love the place and the people. And even now, to-day, after what I have suffered and gone through, I can get more pleasure out of a bit of colour, out of one glimpse of a curling emerald wave before it breaks into foam, than I could find in all the cities of the world.”

He became silent, compressing his lips.

Téphany, realising that the man was actually suffering from the silence he had so long imposed upon himself, said quietly :

“ In the old days you raved about form, Michael ; now it’s colour.”

He snapped at her bait, and spoke most interestingly of colour and curious effects obtained by the use of certain pigments. It became evident that he had studied his subject exhaustively, experimenting with patience and ardour. Listening to him, conscious that the man had sacrificed, or at least had subordinated, personal ambitions to his desire for a wider and deeper understanding of his art, Téphany felt an immense pity flooding her heart. Very dimly she apprehended the truth that her old friend stood self-revealed as one of the very few who dare, knowingly, to abandon what the world calls substance for something ideal, ephemeral, to be seen, to be touched, but never to be captured.

“ As for form,” concluded Michael, “ to you, Téphany, I will say this : I pursued it till it became my slave. I can draw anything I can see, but the colour in the simplest object defeats me.”

“ You succeed sometimes,” she objected. “ That child in the courtyard, for instance——”

“ Oh—that ? ”

Her curiosity, rapidly becoming inordinate, impelled her to mention the child, through whom she might learn more of the girl, the woman.

"Yes—that. It is the best thing I have seen of yours: one of the best things I have ever seen anywhere."

He drew in his breath with a sharp, gasping sound.

"If you had known—well, yes, you are right. But I thought I told you it was not painted from life. I painted it from memory."

"Your memory is strong."

"Strong?" He echoed the word fiercely.

"Yes, you may call it that."

"May I look at it again?"

Growling something she could not quite understand, Michael pulled out the canvas and set it on the easel.

"This is the face of the mask?"

She had put the question before, but it will be remembered that Ossory had not answered it.

"I painted an imaginary child from the cast."

"I have never seen that coif."

She flushed slightly, expecting a scathing rebuke.

"It is a Vannetais coif," said Michael.

"I saw the child last night," said Téphany.

"What? You *saw* her?"

"In a dream."

"Well, tell me about your dream. A good many people believe in the reality of the dream-life, in the wandering of the disembodied spirit. Why, I myself—tell me about your dream."

"The girl played hide-and-seek with me, luring me on to follow her, as if she wished to get me alone."

"Go on!"

"Finally, I lost her; but I heard her singing. That, Michael, was the most vivid part of the dream. I heard her song most distinctly—so distinctly, in fact, that I think I——"

"Well?"

"I think I could hum it."

"I wish you'd try. I have a reason."

She hummed the air of the song, wondering whether the beauty of her voice would appeal to him. But the first bars of it had hardly passed her lips before he held up his hands with an ungovernable gesture of astonishment.

"Great heavens! you heard that? Is it possible?"

Téphany stopped singing. With a tiny shrug of her shoulder and a droop of her lips, which signified disappointment and a sense that she had befooled herself, she said contritely: "Michael, you must forgive me. I played a trick on you. I did hear that song in my dream, and most vividly, but I heard it first from you."

"From me?" He stared at her stupidly.

"Yes. After you left me that first night, you whistled the air, which struck me as something totally unlike anything I had heard before."

"I see. It's a folk-song from the Morbihan country. The Vannetais women sing it."

He spoke quickly and with assumed carelessness, as if he were trying to obliterate what had gone before. Téphany swooped upon the truth, which had leaked from his too eager lips. So then, some girl, some woman, who had played a stupendous part in the drama of Michael's life, had come from Le Morbihan, possibly from Vannes. Yet the cast came from Paris. Her eyes sparkled.

"The Vannetais women? You know, Michael, that my mother came from Vannes. And I have planned an expedition there, to find out, if I can, more about her."

She saw that he was eyeing her furtively, with a distrust which hurt. In an instant she fathomed his thought. He knew that he had betrayed a part of his secret. And the proposed visit to Vannes—which, indeed, Mary Machin and she had determined to pay—troubled him, nay, more, alarmed him. Then the expression, so curiously compounded of annoyance and apprehension, faded as he said lightly: "Vannes is a dear old place, but very, very unfragrant. And, after all these years, do you think it likely that you will find out more than you know already?"

Téphany realised that he had set his strong will against the proposed visit. Instantly she defied his power, rising in arms against his lack of confidence in her, against this deliberate attempt to block her path. But she answered, as carelessly as he:

"Probably not." Then some imp con-

strained her to add : " But one never knows. Searching for one thing I may find another."

She let her eyes meet his frankly, as if she wished to warn him that his desire to thwart her had quickened a desire as potent, on her part, to oppose him.

" True," he replied harshly. " But before now, simple people hunting for a needle in a bundle of hay have laid hands upon a viper."

" How am I to take that, Michael ? "

" As you please. I will make my meaning plainer, if you like. Your mother, whom you can scarcely remember, is of the past. If you are wise, Téphany, you will leave the past alone, particularly"—his voice was threatening—"particularly the past of others."

CHAPTER VI

PÈRE NARCISSE

Si je rejoins Jean-Pierre
Au dernier rendez-vous,
En me mettant en bière
N'enfoncez pas de clous ;
Car ma pauvre âme en peine
Reviendra parmi vous.

TÉPHANY left the studio convinced that Michael loved her no longer. But when she tried to analyse her own feelings, she confronted vague, impalpable subtleties which defied intelligence. She knew, now, that she had remained faithful to the Michael of her youth. Even after her letters were unanswered, during that miserable season when she told herself that he had abandoned her, she still cherished the hope that he would come back, that he would write to explain, that, in the end, it would be well with both of them. And during the years that followed, those laborious years when she was concentrating all energies upon her training as a singer, she thought continually of Michael and herself as two bodies whirled asunder by some mysterious force, but destined to come together again in obedience, perhaps, to the

same inscrutable power. This cherished conviction stood between her and the many men who had desired to marry her ; this and one other thing potent to keep a woman bound to the memory of a lover who has forsaken her. Of the men aforesaid, none was to be compared with Michael in mind or body. Henry Lane had remarked once that if Ossory had not been a painter, he must have proved a poet. Gérôme, to whom Lane was speaking at the time, replied, with greater insight into his favourite pupil's character and temperament : " My dear fellow, if our friend were not a poet, he would not paint as he does." Looking back, Téphany saw clearly that Michael, as poet and painter, had won her heart. Now another Michael, a different man, was challenging her sympathy, her pity, her friendship, but not her love.

Dominating these reflections, or shall we say rather percolating through them, was the further conviction that an identity between the old and new Michael could not be established. She had caught, it is true, glimpses of the strong, ardent youth who had picked her up in his arms and strained her to his breast ; but these glimpses had but served to increase rather than diminish the size of the gulf which yawned between them.

She had moments, too, when she whispered to herself that it would be wise to return to Daffodil Mansions. Yvonne had warned her, Michael had warned her, to leave the past alone. But some spirit within bade her

remain. A fellow-creature was drowning in front of her eyes. Prudence, experience, modesty in her own powers, and a score of less obvious considerations told her that she might lose her life in attempting to save his ; and yet it seemed to be predestined that she should make the attempt.

Upon the day after the events described in the last chapter Téphany met the curé of Pont-Aven ; not the dear old man who had baptized her and listened to childish confessions of innumerable peccadilloes, but a stranger, Père Narcisse. Obeying an impulse, Téphany entered into conversation with him. An offer to subscribe to a local charity challenged the village priest's attention, an attention which Téphany's personality soon quickened into a lively interest. The curé was of a type happily not uncommon in Finistère. Like most Breton priests outside of the big towns, he was born of the people, although he had received an admirable education at a theological college. But under his soutane throbbed the big heart, the sturdy muscles, the intense vitality and virility of a son of the soil. Téphany recognised this, with keen appreciation of such qualities.

For the first few minutes the talk fluttered about the changes in Pont-Aven. Téphany asked questions, M. le vicaire answered them. Then, an odd sparkle in the shrewd hazel eyes, a genial smile, the subtle assumption of a fatherly manner, told Téphany that she had

been identified as the daughter of Henry Lane.

" You know who I am, Monsieur ? "

" Yes," he added with a pleasant laugh which tempered the rebuke : " I thought you would have come to see me, my daughter, before this."

Téphany felt that her cheeks were hanging out signals of distress, but her voice was calm enough as she replied : " I understand you perfectly. But I no longer belong to your Church."

" You have ceased to be a Catholic, Mademoiselle ? "

" I cannot call myself a Roman Catholic," she answered gently.

The curé opened his wide mouth and closed it. He had tact. With a humorous shrug of his broad shoulders, he murmured : " I am not unprepared for this. Yvonne told me you had spent the last ten years in England."

Téphany broke the ice which had formed between them with a smile. The curé's expression when the word " England " fell from his lips indicated accurately enough his limitations.

" You won't refuse English money ? " said Téphany.

" I would accept alms for my poor people from the king of the cannibals ; how much more from a young and charming lady ? All the same we must have some talks, you and I."

" Many, I hope," said Téphany gravely.

As Père Narcisse went his way Téphany reflected that here was a man who might help her. She thought with pleasure of his large, sinewy hands, his square, massive head. Head and hands indicated grasp, tenacity, and power.

That evening Mary Machin and she were sitting in the big salon of the annexe with Carne and Keats. Carne was holding forth. Téphany listened half smiling, because, in Carne's voice, she caught echoes of what Michael had said long ago. Like Michael, the Californian seemed to have made a special study of the province, although this was his first visit to Pont-Aven.

"I met the curé to-day," said Téphany.

Carne had plenty to say about Père Narcisse. Keats, too, put in a word :

"A good fellow, that. The big square peg in the big square hole. Of course the day of these priests is drawing to a close."

"Just so," said Machie, nodding.

"I don't agree with you, Mr. Keats," Téphany said, with a slight emphasis. "The day is dawning. Their interference in politics has brought upon them heavy punishment—and I, for one, don't regret it. Now they will attend to what really concerns them, to what they thoroughly understand. What threatens the soul of the province is not Rationalism, nor Freemasonry, as some of the priests would have us believe, but drink. Let the priests fight that."

"I'll step off my perch," said Keats cheer-

fully. " You've forgotten more about Brittany than I ever knew, Miss Lane."

" I know something of Bretons. I've seen very little of Brittany."

Carne began to talk of Tréguier, the Léonais country, and Lower Brittany. He had attended most of the great " Pardons," had paid a pilgrimage to Sainte Anne d'Auray, had sketched the huge menhirs and dolmens of Locmariaker. Téphany listened, on edge to ask a question, and yet shrinking from the first plunge. Finally, she said carelessly : " I daresay you sketched the different coifs ? "

" Some of them, Miss Lane."

" This Pont-Aven coif is the prettiest I have seen," said Keats.

Carne considered.

" Well, I don't know. The coif the girls wear at Arles, in Provence, is quite charming. This Pont-Aven coif is rather too much of a good thing, eh ? "

" You like the simpler forms ? " said Téphany.

" Yes, I do, Miss Lane. I like to see a girl wearing a coif ; not a coif wearing a girl."

" May I see your studies ? " said Téphany, with a slight flush.

" They're out of sight," observed Keats enthusiastically.

" They are," said Carne, " but I'll fetch them."

Presently he returned with a large portfolio, containing some drawings. Téphany looked at one after the other, very slowly and care

fully. Half way through the portfolio, she said: "Oh, this is a very pretty coif."

"That? Why, let me see, where did I do that? Of course, Port Navalô. I'm not likely to forget Port Navalô. Yes, as you say, Miss Lane, a very pretty coif, not unlike the Auray coif. You know there is a symbolism about these coifs. An interesting subject, that."

Mary Machin begged him to go on. While he spoke Téphany sat gazing at the study of the girl from Port Navalô, who wore the identical coif of the girl whom Michael had painted in Yvonne's courtyard. But, according to Yvonne, who was a stickler for the truth, the girl had never stood in the courtyard. And Michael had said that the picture was painted from the mask. In exasperating contradiction to these statements rose the conviction that the girl's face, so remarkable, so perplexing in its expression and chameleon-like power of changing that expression, had haunted Yvonne's dreams. Téphany felt more or less certain that Yvonne had seen the picture, possibly the mask, and that she had reason to connect one or the other with some lamentable knowledge concerning Michael. These thoughts ran through her mind while she listened to Carne's incisive, high-pitched voice.

"I have noticed," he was saying, "that the coif gives one a fairly accurate notion of the character and temperament of its wearer. The absolutely plain cap, for instance, bare of

riband or frill, a mere bit of linen, is worn by the woman who works like a man in the fields, who has little vanity, no imagination, and no sense at all of what is beautiful. Millet put just such caps on the heads of his models. One could hardly conceive his peasants in the dainty, fluttering head-dress the girls wear here."

"That's right," said Keats admiringly. "You're great this evening, Clinton. Isn't he, Miss Machin?"

"Please go on," said Mary. Carne had curly hair and a well-cut profile; young men with curly hair were very attractive to her.

"What I've said would strike any one," Carne admitted, with becoming modesty. "It's the A B C of the thing. But when we come to the ornamented coifs, it's not so easy to interpret them. Now the coif on the head of that girl, Miss Lane, the Port Navalo girl——"

"Yes; what do you make of that?"

"It's rather a long story."

"So much the better," said Miss Machin. "I like long stories. I like long novels, such as Sir Walter Scott wrote."

Thus encouraged, the Californian continued fluently:

"I said just now that I was not likely to forget Port Navalo, and to explain that coif I must tell you why. I spent last summer on one of the islands of the Gulf of Morbihan, the Île aux Moines; but I explored all the queer country about the gulf. Port Navalo is

a fishing village, perched on the extreme point of the peninsula which faces Locmariaker. Between Port Navalo and Locmariaker is a narrow channel known as La Jument. When the tide is ebbing or flowing strongly La Jument becomes one of the most fearful races in the world. And what makes the place so awful and yet so fascinating is the fact that, on a midsummer's day, when there's no wind and the gulf is like a mill-pool, La Jument seems to be possessed of ten thousand devils. At high tide and low tide the channel is not much more interesting than a canal. Then the boats sail up and down it in perfect safety. While you are doing this the change comes. The quiet water begins to bubble as if it were a sort of chalybeate spring ; then it swirls ; then it boils ; then it transforms itself into a raging rapid, like the Niagara rapids—and from the same cause. Behind this narrow channel is the Atlantic, in front the gulf. When the tide is ebbing, all the water in the gulf has to pass through this Devil's Gate, when the tide flows the Atlantic drives these millions of tons of water back again. See ! ”

“ I'd like to see it,” said Téphany.

“ From a safe place,” added Mary Machin.

“ I was describing the race in midsummer weather. Now conceive of it when a storm is raging.”

“ I'd rather not,” said Miss Machin, with a shudder.

“ It's horrible then,” said Carne, in a voice

that thrilled. “It’s appalling, Miss Machin, blood-curdling ! And, remember, *La Jument*, which swallows up scores of lives, is set in the heart of Lower Brittany. Within two hundred years—I had this on high authority—human sacrifices have taken place near Locmariaker. The peasants are Druids still. Now, what sort of effect would such a natural phenomenon as this awful race have on their minds ? You can all make a guess, a faint guess, at the terror it inspires in credulous, superstitious souls, when I tell you that I”—he laughed grimly—“an up-to-date Westerner, not easily scared, could never look at the thing without shuddering. . . .”

“I shan’t sleep a wink to-night, but please go on,” said Mary Machin.

“Every stick and stone in that country has its story,” Carne continued ; “and take it from me that the peasants and fisher-folk believe these stories, although they say they don’t. But, apart from their superstition, they are a gay, pleasure-loving people, quite different, for instance, from the sort of men and women one finds near the Pointe du Raz.¹ Now, don’t laugh, but my contention is that if it were not for *La Jument* and those horrible menhirs and dolmens, the Morbihan coifs would be as flamboyant as the coifs here and at Quimperlé ; but the women don’t dare to indulge in silk and streamers. What follows ? Their fancy, which is exquisitely graceful, finds expression

¹ Pointe du Raz guards the terrific Baie des Trépassés.

in delicate hemming and embroidery. You get the simple lines, rigidly restrained, as in this coif, and you will find in the girls, what you see in their head-dress, a sort of shy, restrained fascination, nothing to catch the eye at first sight, but something which allures tremendously. It's not easy to express what one means. But you're the daughter of a painter, Miss Lane, and you paint a bit yourself. Well, you know the delight of finding colour in semi-tones, in soft greys, which melt and shimmer into all the tints of the rainbow ? Yes. Whistler ought to have painted some of those girls. I tried, and missed what I was after. I don't know enough yet, but I'm going back. I've been giving you a lecture.

"Clinton can keep it up all night," said Johnnie Keats.

Carne laughed, collected his studies, thrust them into the portfolio, and took his leave. Mary Machin said to Téphany :

"We must go to Port Navalo ? "

"Perhaps," Téphany answered.

During the week that followed, she saw but little of Michael Ossory, being unwilling to visit his studio till she had resolved certain problems sorely perplexing her. They met twice, however, upon the old Concarneau road, where Ossory happened to be painting each morning. Téphany introduced Michael to Mary Machin, uncomfortably sensible that he might play the bear. To her relief, he behaved with courtesy.

" My dear," said Machie, afterwards, " he is the most interesting man I ever met who wears a beard. If he would shave, really, I——"

Téphany interrupted her.

" Machie, will you do me a favour ? Please don't speak to Mr. Ossory of Port Naval, and don't ask me any questions yet."

At *table d'hôte* Miss Machin told Clinton Carne that she had met the Hermit.

" And if he'd only shave—— He is so very much in the rough."

" I've met him, too," said Carne.

" Have you ?" said Téphany, eagerly ; then, checking herself, she added quietly : " Have you talked with him ?"

" He is extremely kind, and a remarkable draughtsman. I was struggling with a foreshortened curve, and in despair, when he passed me. Somehow I seemed to feel that he sympathised. He stopped for an instant, and I had time to growl out something. He looked me square in the eye ; then he said, most civilly : ' May I show you how to do that ?' His tone of assurance rather struck me, because I had come to the conclusion that there were just about four men in Paris, and four only, who could tackle that curve. ' I shall be much obliged,' said I. With that he took my palette, picked out a whacking big brush, and went to work. In one minute the trick was done. I tried to get him to talk, but he bolted. And ever since I've been

asking myself why the dickens he isn't at the top of the ladder?"

"Ossory looks at me," said Johnnie Keats, "as if he knew exactly the all sorts of a fool I am."

Everybody laughed except Téphany. She was angry with herself, because the recital of this tiny incident revealed the Michael whom, the day before, she was trying to forget.

In the afternoon of the same day she took a cheque to the curé, who looked at it in astonishment, confounded by the amount.

"You give me twenty-five hundred francs for my people?"

"They are my people, too, my father."

"True, true!" He put the cheque into a much-frayed pocket-book, slightly frowning, as if puzzled. Then, with the touch of humour which had so pleased Téphany when they first met, he added, chuckling: "It is strange that I should get two cheques from"—he paused, and his genial smile took all the sting out of the next word—"from heretics."

"Two?"

"Monsieur Ossory, the English painter, is very, very generous; although, to be sure——"

"Although——"

"I am indiscreet, Mademoiselle." Then, as Téphany shook her head, he added: "That is to say, sometimes; but you won't betray me. Monsieur Ossory is very generous, as I say, which is the more remarkable because I am told that he is far from rich; but the money

which he gives me must be spent as he directs."

Téphany perceived that he had something to tell, and, under slight pressure, might tell it. She wondered if a man of honour of her own class would use pressure. She was very human, as you will find out when you know her better. She nodded, with a delicate gesture of interrogation.

"My old people, who have worked hard all their lives and who can work no longer, have the first claim upon our charity, is it not so? Obviously. But Monsieur Ossory won't give a sou to me for them."

"Oh!" Téphany exclaimed. She knew now that she was on the brink of discovering another clue to the mystery which lay between Michael and herself. Her pride urged her to step back. During the past few days, ever since, in fact, her last visit to the studio, she had told herself that a self-respecting woman must respect others. Michael had refused to give her confidence; nay, more, he had warned her against curiosity. When he bade her leave the past alone she vowed to herself that she would obey him. And yet she had been unable to withstand the temptation to listen to Clinton Carne; and now she was equally unable to turn her back on Père Narcisse. She had the grace to blush, as she asked:

"To whom, then, does he give his money?"

"It is given to girls."

"That is certainly odd," Téphany murmured, with a little gasp.

"What I have told you is between ourselves, Mademoiselle. For the rest, it is not so odd after all. Monsieur himself said to me that the lives of the young are often spoiled for the lack of a little money, and the lives of the old have been lived." He sighed, and his shrewd eyes softened, becoming sombre and full of shadows. Looking at him now Téphany saw that he was a Breton indeed under his soutane. Upon the impulse of the moment she leaped barriers.

"My father"—at the tone of her voice the Breton vanished; the priest, alert, inviting confidence, strong in his power to comfort and advise, smiled paternally—"it must have struck you that Monsieur Ossory, who helps others, needs help himself."

"Do we not all need help?" he asked keenly.

"Ah, yes; but he—in particular—" Her voice faltered.

"You know him well, Mademoiselle?"

"I knew him long ago, very well indeed. He was my father's friend and mine." She spoke warmly of Michael's kindness to her when she found herself an orphan. The curé nodded sympathisingly. "And now," she concluded, "I come back after ten years, and I am told by—by—I will be quite frank—I am told by Yvonne, who was once his friend, that he is lost—her word. *Lost!*"

They were sitting in the small reception-room of the presbytery, the same room wherein Téphany had been prepared for confirmation. It had changed but little. The walls were whitewashed as of yore, the chairs were uncomfortably hard; but the view from the window revealed a tiny garden, gay with geraniums, roses, and some tall, nodding holly-hocks. The garden symbolised the beauty of the world outside; the flowers might be compared to ephemeral joys, innocent and sweet, but destined to wither and decay within a few brief hours.

The curé hesitated; when he spoke his manner had changed subtly. Téphany realised that she had led him out of familiar channels into unknown waters. He had always dealt, sturdily and capably, with his like—peasants and fishermen. To such a man Ossory must seem a creature of another world. For an instant she feared that the priest would ascend his pulpit, and proclaim his gospel in obvious, time-worn phrases. Her respect for him expanded enormously, her belief in his goodness and sympathy became impregnable, when he answered with humility :

“ My daughter, if I could see my way, or any way, to help our friend, I should place myself at his service. From the day when we first met, some years ago now, he has had my prayers. Well, I ”—his voice became virile, infused with an extraordinary virtue, as he concluded—“ I know that some prayers are

answered, and perhaps for him the prayers of his friends are the only help they can offer."

"Let us assume," Téphany said abruptly, "that you and I divine that a shadow—ah! why should we veil our words?—let us assume, you and I, his friends, that some sin," her voice sank to a whisper, "stands between him and us—"

"Go on, my daughter."

"And if it be so, if one's intuition is not at fault, if this barrier shuts him from us, ought we not to pull it down, to destroy it, if we can?"

"That is well said; but how do you propose to pull down, to destroy what is invisible?"

"We must see it first," she murmured.

The curé rose from his chair and walked to the window. Téphany was glad that he had taken time to weigh his answer. She wondered whether he guessed the little that she had left unsaid. Presently he turned, and faced her.

"I am not quick," he said. "I do not shoot my bird on the wing, you understand; but I have had experience, and I am patient. But you"—again his voice softened delightfully—"are young and impatient. Yes, yes; that is natural. And then, again"—Téphany could see that he was laboriously fitting himself into her shoes—"you are a visitor to Pont-Aven; you are leaving soon, may be, and if you are to pull down walls, granite walls," he added, with a

shrewd allusion to the almost indestructible walls of the province, “you wish to go to work at once. Is it not so ?”

“ Yes ; you read me easily, my father.”

“ No, no ; I cannot read you easily ; it is doubtful if you can read yourself, *easily*. But this is plain to me : you ask me to help you to discover some secret which our friend has chosen not to reveal to us ? You ask me to join you, first of all, in a hunt for some hidden sin—your own word, my daughter. Having found this sin, we unite to destroy it. Put bluntly—I am a blunt man—this is what you ask ?”

“ It sounds very dreadful,” said Téphany ; “and I think the case might be stated less bluntly. Yes ; I ask your help to find, if it be possible, the brave, the gallant man whom Yvonne says is lost.”

“ You move too fast. Do you think that you and I can destroy a sin, my daughter ?”

“ The sin itself ? Of course not.”

“ Or its effects ?”

“ You force me to confess how badly I have worded my thoughts. The sin and its effects cannot be destroyed by human hands ; but the barrier, the shadow—my first word was, after all, the right one—the shadow which sin casts and which pride intensifies does vanish, not always, but often, often, beneath the light of knowledge. To know all is to pardon. And if one knows nothing, what can one do ?”

The curé smiled ; then he murmured : " I am sorry, very sorry, but I cannot help you, my daughter."

" You can at least do this," said Téphany, driven to the wall : " you can tell me frankly whether in your opinion I am justified in trying to find out all I can by fair means."

" By fair means ? "

" I know already two facts of importance. These facts will lead me on to others. In a word, I can advance, knowing that not very far away is the truth, or I can turn my back on Pont-Aven for ever."

Her voice must have told the reader of many hearts that the issues at stake involved as much to the woman who stood before him as to the man whose salvation, perhaps, hung upon the answer he was entreated to give. Again he walked to the window and gazed out into the gay little garden beyond. It seemed to Téphany an eternity before he came back and took her hand between his large, rough palms. " You are a good woman," he said gravely, " good and pure." He stared hard into her eyes ; but she met his glance without wincing. " You ask me a question which a wiser man than I would find hard to answer, but I am going to answer it according to my lights."

" One moment," said Téphany. He saw that she was trembling violently, that her eyes were wet. " Before you speak I wish to say this : many women ask lightly for advice, meaning

to take it or reject it according as it pleases them. "I"—she controlled herself, raised her head, and spoke proudly, without a quiver of voice or lips—"I am not one of those women, my father. I have asked for your advice because I—mean—to—take—it."

CHAPTER VII

SHADOWS

Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still.

PÈRE NARCISSE smiled faintly, as if he had had large experience of women's special pleading, and, perhaps, had been beguiled more than once into allowing his heart to overrule his head. Then he said slowly :

"Thank you, my daughter; although you make my task harder, I shall not shrink from it. Your friend—and mine—is, although he tries to disguise it, of a nature expansive and ingenuous. He has let slip some facts which, as you say, point the way to others. It is because of this that we must be the more careful of picking up what does not belong to us. You agree with me, I see. Therefore I say to you, do not go on."

"I am to go back?" A slight gasp betrayed her disappointment.

"No. If I beg you not to advance, I beg you as strongly not to retreat. There is a third, and very obvious, course which does not seem to have occurred to you. Remain where

you are. Perhaps—who can tell?—Monsieur Ossory will confide in you when he perceives that you are loyal in friendship. As a priest, it is my duty to urge my flock to confess their sins; as a friend I have always refrained from doing so."

Téphany thanked Père Narcisse, and shortly after took her leave, fortified and uplifted in spirit. How well this rugged parish priest was named. She let her mind dwell with delight upon the rough bulb, stained by earth, common in appearance, out of which had bloomed so delicate, so fresh and fragrant a spirit. In the moment of parting she made sure that he had blessed her, and she believed that the blessing of such a man would prove a blessing indeed.

Below the bridge Machie was sketching—spoiling good paper, as Johnnie Keats put it. As yet Téphany had made no sketches. Machie used the small water-colour box of the amateur; Téphany painted in oil, with a professional's tools. After she left the presbytery she reflected that it might be expedient to set to work. Work would distract her mind. But, first of all, she would see Michael and let him know that she was loyal and honest—not an Autolycus in petticoats, snapping up unconsidered trifles. She blushed hotly when she perceived herself playing this questionable part. Michael had told her that he worked in his studio in the afternoon whenever he painted outside in the morning.

As she mounted the stairs she heard him

singing the Vannetais folk-song, with its peculiar haunting refrain. Why did it obsess him and her?

Michael welcomed her warmly, offered her tea, and began to talk of their adventures together ten years before. Presently Téphany said quietly that she was going to begin to paint next day.

"It's in the air here," she said. "One must do it."

"You used to have talent, but——" A slight shrug of the shoulder conveyed the idea that Michael did not overrate mere talent.

"Mr. Carne is very grateful to you, Michael."

"How do you like him, Téphany?"

The abrupt question startled her.

"He raves of you," said Michael, as she hesitated.

Téphany raised her delicate eyebrows and smiled. She had faced the fact that the Californian was likely to make love to her. He was ardent, enthusiastic, very susceptible.

"Well?"

"I don't know whether I like him or not," she answered. "He interests me very much. You consider him clever?"

"Clever? He is much more than that. He has insight, originality, and ambition. In him I seem to see a sort of vague reflection of myself."

"I saw that, too," said Téphany.

"I have told him to come up here. So you

are going to work yourself, eh ? But how about that expedition to Vannes ? ”

The directness of his attack, so characteristic of the old Michael, crumbled up the little plan she had made of delicately informing him that she intended to leave the past alone. Now, almost as candidly as he, she replied :

“ Michael, I am not going to Vannes.”

They stared at each other till Téphany’s eyes fell. But Michael read in her face all she had intended to say, and much more. In his old familiar tones, he exclaimed :

“ You are amazing, Téphany. If I had known, if I had guessed that——” He broke off suddenly, snapping his too eager lips together ; then, in a quieter voice, he finished : “ Well now, look here, you astounding person, if you have really made up your mind—by Heaven ! it must be a bigger mind than is given to most women—if you have made up your mind to put curiosity from you——”

“ I have,” she interrupted. “ I was tempted, Michael. Oh, I’ve been a beast. But, now, I’ve cast out my devil.”

“ And nothing is left but the angel.”

“ Angel ? ” She laughed scornfully. “ What is left is a woman. And men like you expect women to give more than they receive.”

“ Ah, God ! that is true.”

She divined that, unconsciously, she had hurt him ; she divined also—how she could not have explained—that he was thinking of another woman, not of her.

"Because of that," she continued hurriedly, "I am going to give you what you choose to withhold from me: confidence, trust. But don't think for a moment that I am satisfied with such a one-sided arrangement. Once, I was your friend——"

"Surely you consider yourself my friend still?"

He asked the question almost fiercely.

"I consider the Michael whom I knew so well long ago my friend, the greatest friend I have ever had, but I don't know *you*. At least"—she hesitated, searching for words that would fall like rain, not hail, upon his sensibilities—"at least, I only know tiny little bits of *you*. I have to reconstruct a new friend, you see, out of what is left of the old."

"Go on!"

"Well, then, it is something, isn't it? that I want to do this, that I am willing to pick up crumbs when the loaf is denied me; but make no mistake, Michael, there is a shadow between us."

"A shadow? More than that, Téphany."

"In my mind I have called it a wall, a granite wall; but I come back to the first word, a shadow. The word is the right one, indeed the only one. Walls may be climbed or battered down, but shadows"—she shivered, adding in a piteously childish voice—"I have always been frightened out of my life by shadows." Then, assuming her former firm, reasonable tone, she continued: "This shadow

lies between us, and must lie between us, till it is dispelled by you."

"Then it will remain for ever."

He flashed a glance upon her, which she could not interpret. A certain defiance characterised her reply: "That is for you to decide."

"You scourge me; yes, you do, and I feel—I feel—" He was rigid with agitation, but as she shrank back, his muscles and nerves seemed to relax. In a humble, entreating tone, he said: "I feel like a spaniel."

"But I would not scourge you for the world."

"I deserve it. Don't speak. There is a black shadow. And it must remain. Think what you please, Téphany. Or, rather, think this." He paced twice the length of the studio. When he stopped he mastered himself. In a quiet, impressive tone, infinitely more impressive than his former agitation, he made confession:

"I am a great sinner. You understand, Téphany, that it is a sin—a *crime*, which stands between you and me. And there is more. This sin, this crime, was committed by me deliberately. There are no extenuating circumstances."

Téphany's colour ebbed from her cheeks and lips. Her face was as the face of the mask in the room beyond.

"Having said so much," he continued, in the same monotonous whisper, "why should I

not tell you everything? Because—I cannot. I might tell others, if it were necessary, but I cannot tell you, because in the old days I loved you."

"Ah!"

The colour flowed back into her face.

"Did you guess that, Téphany?"

"Yes," she faltered.

"Now"—a more human note crept back into his voice—"you are here, as I said the night we met, and I am here. And I want to hold on to what is left. To see you again, to talk with you, to feel your kind glance melting the ice in my heart—this, this is all that is left, and I cannot, I will not let it go. Perhaps you think that I am morbid, that I exaggerate. Wait! Yvonne was my friend. No man had ever a better. When I first came to Pont-Aven I hadn't a sou. Yvonne trusted me. She boarded and fed me. I was not able to square money matters with her till an uncle died and I came into the small income upon which I live now. Such friends are rare. Well, she knows what I have done. And she has never spoken to me since. And she is not a hard woman. And if you knew what she knows, you would turn from me too."

"No."

"I say—yes. But, if such a thing were possible, if you, Téphany, forgave the sinner, and you might, for you have a big heart, you could not wipe out the sin."

She thought of what the curé had said, and remained silent.

"You could not wipe out the sin," he repeated. "And the fact that you knew of it, the fact that such knowledge inspired pity instead of detestation, the fact, the almost incredible fact, that you turned to me instead of from me would drive me from you, as his crime drove Cain from the presence of the mother, who, alone of all his fellow creatures, may have held out pitying arms to him. Should the day come, and it may come, when you know what I have done, I shall turn from you."

When he had finished speaking, Michael hurried into his bedroom, locking the door between himself and the woman who was gazing at him, unable to speak, because the tears were streaming down her face. She hoped that after a few minutes he would return, and so hoping she dried her wet eyes and cheeks, and tried to summon up a smile. When he did not answer her timid tap upon the panels of his door, she knew that he was passing through an agony which she was powerless to share or to alleviate. Seeing a piece of charcoal lying by his palette, she picked it up and wrote upon a blank sheet of paper:

If you turn from me, dear Michael, do not turn from God.

She pushed the piece of paper under the door, and slipped quietly away.

Then she walked to Nizon, to pray before

the Calvary. She prayed, divining that Michael had turned from his God, that he had forsaken the faith which once, assuredly, had been his. And praying, the thought came to her again, as it had come before, that men might pull down and break to pieces their faith, trampling upon it, perhaps, in wild, unreasoning rage and despair, as the children of the Terror had pulled down and broken the Calvary above; and yet, in the fulness of time, that same faith, imperishable as the granite, might be pieced together and restored by the very hands which had levelled it with the dust.

Greatly comforted, she left the cemetery, and returned through the Bois d'Amour to Pont-Aven. Presently she came to a tiny glade carpeted with moss, overshadowed by oaks, whose gnarled branches threw twisted shadows upon the vividly green sward. Téphany sat down upon a carpet thicker and more beautiful than any that has been woven in looms. Beneath it, however, lay a sterile and barren soil, impotent to produce either flowers or grasses. Here and there great masses of granite were scattered: the monuments of those Titanic forces which, æons before, had made this peaceful spot their battle-ground. But even these cold stones were lovely to the eye by reason of the exquisite golden saxifrage, the ferns and lichens which encrusted them. In this world, at any rate, there was nothing so monstrous,

so twisted and perverted by violence, that nature, if she were permitted a free hand, would not soften and beautify.

Thus reflecting, Téphany became curiously aware of a more intimate acquaintance with these huge rocks. Suddenly the years rolled back. Long ago she had sat in this secluded spot alone with Michael. He had come here to paint that oak yonder, and she, a child of thirteen, had carried his camp-stool. And then, tired of attempting the impossible, confessing frankly, as he always did, that the intertwined complexities of light and shadow had defeated him, he sat down beside his companion, and at her entreaty told a story : the allegory of *le Vieux Guillaume*,¹ who, for twenty-four hours played the part of curé of Pont-Aven. During the period in which Evil was thus allowed to masquerade as Good, the fiend was pledged to dispense blessings only, to enrich, not to despoil, his parishioners. Upon entering Pont-Aven—Michael, according to his habit, had localised the scene of the legend—the fiend entered a hut inhabited by a newly married couple, about to sit down to eat their dinner of black bread. Expressing his pity at seeing such meagre fare, the fiend asked if they desired something better. Ah, yes. If once, only once, they could dine as the quality dined, both bride and groom would be entirely happy. The fiend smiled, promising a banquet, and then bade them good-night.

¹Old Nick.

Farther on he met a young girl about to be married to a peasant, a labourer in the fields. The girl curtsied to the supposed curé and, after some chat, confessed her fears that her future husband might take advantage of his superior strength to beat her. Whereupon the fiend gave to her, together with his blessing, a ring, which he said would kindle enduring love in the heart of any man who beheld it. The maid thanked the curé effusively. Farther on the fiend passed three brothers, known and respected in Pont-Aven by reason of the great affection which they bore each other, living together and having all things in common. The fiend saluting them and asking how they fared, the brothers complained of the difficulty of cultivating an arid and stony soil with such antiquated ploughs as they possessed. Whereupon the fiend presented a plough which needed no sharpening and would work by itself, upon the condition that the brothers drew lots for it. The lot fell to the youngest, and the curé departed amid thanks and blessings. But that evening, as the fiend was about to sit down to supper, lamentable news came to the presbytery: The newly married pair were dead of a surfeit. A nobleman, perceiving the ring on the finger of the maid, had become so desperately enamoured of her that he had persuaded her to elope with him upon his horse; the horse, plunging violently, had thrown the riders, who were picked up with broken necks, stone dead.

Finally, the brother to whom the magic plough had been presented, seeing that it meant unlimited wealth to its fortunate possessor, had announced his intention of leaving his brothers, who, fired with jealous rage, first slew him, and then in remorse hanged themselves. The obvious moral to the legend is: darling desires, if granted to mortals, will change most saints into sinners.

Téphany, sitting in the place where she and Michael had sat twelve years before, remembered his last letter. He had written that what he had desired for years and years seemed to be within sight and grasp.

And what had he desired above all earthly blessings?

To paint a masterpiece.

That had been on his lips a thousand times. Now, in some vague way, Téphany linked together in her mind three things: the legend of le Vieux Guillaume, Michael's passionate wish to paint a great picture, and his sin.

When she returned to Pont-Aven, Mary Machin was putting away her paint-box in the big studio in the annexe which Téphany had taken. Farther down the passage was another studio used by Carne whenever he painted indoors. The Californian had invited both ladies to visit his studio, and hearing him whistling in it Machie proposed that they should peep in.

“This afternoon,” said Machie, “Mr. Carne

passed me as I was drawing ; and he gave me some very valuable hints. He also said that he would like to make a study of your head, my dear."

" The inside or the out ? " Téphany asked.

" He is capable of doing justice to both. By the way, he sees a likeness between you and," she mentioned Téphany's stage name, " Marie de Lautrec."

" Gracious ! Does he suspect ? "

" He was in Milan when we were there."

" If he'd recognised you, Machie—— I never thought of that. Or your name, which is uncommon."

" My name only became public property "—Miss Machin sniffed, recalling the remark about the muffin—" when we were in the States."

They passed down the passage and knocked at the Californian's door. His pleasure at seeing Téphany was written very plainly on his handsome, intelligent face.

" Come in—come in—this is so nice and friendly of you."

He hustled about, finding them chairs and cushions, offering them a mild cocktail.

" I like cocktails," said Machie.

" Do you ? Have you been in my country, Miss Machin ? "

" One gets cocktails everywhere," said Téphany. " Miss Machin and I drank our first one in——"

" Paris," said Machie placidly.

" Do let me mix you a Manhattan."

The ladies, however, refused refreshment, and begged to be allowed to see his canvases. Carne pulled them out, one after the other, talking fluently, criticising his own work unsparingly, but with appreciation of its good qualities.

"How keen you are!" said Téphany.

"I am very keen," he assented. "You see, my two brothers are successful business men; and my father is dead set against Art. So I have to show them that I'm not going to take a back seat."

Asking permission, he lit a cigarette, which he had rolled quickly and dexterously.

"I don't see you in a back seat," said Téphany.

"Thank you, Miss Lane. But, after all, in Art, as in everything else, although merit must tell in the long run, yet, at the same time, there's a lot of luck in making a hit early in one's career. Look at Théodore Rousseau, *le grand Réfusé* they called him. Some of the best men don't arrive till they are grey-headed. Some, like our friend Ossory, Miss Lane, don't arrive at all."

Téphany frowned, sensible that she resented this familiar chatter about Michael, sensible also that she was quite powerless to prevent it.

"He's a wonder, that fellow," Carne continued. "He can draw magnificently, but he's a crank. What d'you think of this?"

"This" was an admirable study of a woman, a Paris model. Carne continued:

"My Salon picture this year, which got an Honourable Mention, is a group of girls bathing: trite as a subject, but I don't care about that. I went for certain subtleties of light and colour. Here's a photograph of it."

He showed the photograph to his visitors. As they were looking at it, Keats poked his head into the room.

"Come in, Johnnie," said Carne. "I'm showing these ladies my stuff."

Keats entered; then, seeing the photograph in Téphany's hand, he burst out enthusiastically: "But the one in last year's Salon is the best thing he's done so far. Where's the photograph of that, Clinton? Tell Miss Lane about it; it'll amuse her, because she's been behind the scenes."

Carne produced the photograph, which represented a very young girl about to step into a pool of water, and looking round over her shoulder. It struck Téphany as odd that a clever man should choose two subjects so alike and so commonplace. But, looking at the photograph more closely, she perceived it to be very far from commonplace. To reach the pool, the nymph had to cross a swampy piece of ground. She had just withdrawn an exquisitely modelled foot, stained with mud and dripping slime. The expression upon the face, half turned to the beholder, was one of fear, excitement, and a delightful virginal shyness.

"There is quality in that," said Téphany.

"It was snapped up at once by—"

Carne interrupted with a sharp "Miss Lane is interested in art, not commerce."

"Who bought it, Mr. Keats?"

"A man who's supposed to be one of the best judges in New York—old Isaac Blumenthal."

"The man who has the wonderful saloon, with Bouguereau's picture hanging behind the bar?"

"Yes, Miss Lane. Clinton is in Blumenthal's little gallery."

For an instant there was silence. Then Téphany said slowly: "I wonder where you found such a captivating model?"

"That's another story," said Keats.

"Do you know New York?" Carne looked sharply at Téphany.

"As a bird of passage; Miss Machin and I have been round the world together. But about this model?" She looked expectantly at Keats, anxious to turn the talk from herself.

"Shall I tell it, Clinton?"

"If you like."

"She was manufactured," said Keats, opening his wide mouth in a broad grin.

"Manufactured?" Machie repeated.

"Head belongs to one girl, body to another. That's often done: sort o' composite picture. Clinton got a regular model for the body, another for the arm, another for the foot. That's the prettiest foot in Paris. But we couldn't get the right kind of face. Finally, one day at Passy, we struck the niece of an old

woman who sold *crêpes*. The girl at first refused to let Clinton put her head on to another woman's nude figure."

"I don't wonder," murmured Miss Machin.

"But Clinton worked it," concluded Keats triumphantly; "he's a puller of strings, he is. And the girl posed with the very expression he wanted."

"That will do," said Carne, glancing at Téphany's face, wondering whether this story had amused her. In his pleasant, incisive voice, he added, smiling: "So you have been into Blumenthal's saloon. And into other places, no doubt, as distinctively American. And how did you like the land of the free and the home of the brave?"

"I saw a great deal of it," Téphany replied, "mostly through the windows of a Pullman car. My impressions are not worth telling."

"But our people? How did you, how do you like Americans?"

"They are very kind."

"Kind?" repeated Machie. "I should think they are kind. Why, at Chicago—" she hesitated, biting her lip.

"Yes; at Chicago—"

"At Chicago," Téphany said coolly, "I lost my boxes; I mean they were delayed. And some ladies actually came forward and offered to provide me with clothes."

"That's queer," said Keats, "I happened to read in *The New York Herald* of the Chicago women fitting out a singer for grand opera.

Her stage dresses got sent on with her private ones, or something of that sort."

Téphany, conscious that Carne's grey eyes were on her, flushed delicately as she rose.

"We shall see you at the Riec Pardon tomorrow?" she asked Carne.

"Certainly."

"Thank you so much for showing us your studies."

"You and Miss Machin will always be welcome here," he replied gallantly, going forward to open the door. Suddenly Téphany paused; a slight gasp escaped from her lips. Carne saw that she was staring at a plaster cast which hung upon a nail just above the door. Téphany, sitting with her back to this door, had not perceived the cast till this moment. It was the same which Michael had shown to her.

"Is that yours?" she asked.

"It belongs to Keats," said Carne, wondering why she looked so pale.

"Who is it?" said Téphany. Keats answered the question.

"Ah! Who is it? A good many people have asked that question, Miss Lane, and nobody has answered it."

"But where did you get it?"

"From Tornabuoni, the plaster-cast seller in Montmartre. The girl was found drowned in the Seine. She was taken to the Morgue, I believe, and that cast taken of her face. But she was never identified."

"Never identified?" repeated Téphany.

"Never. You admire it, Miss Lane?"

"Yes."

"If one could interpret that smile——" said Keats.

Téphany answered constrainedly: "She may be smiling at all those who pursue ambition regardless of the consequences. Does anybody know *anything* about her?" She turned from Keats to Carne, who shook his head.

"The authorities never found out how she got into the Seine," said Carne. "Suicide is the generally accepted explanation, but——"

"Yes?"

"Miss Lane, you are quite upset. I have always maintained that there is something uncanny about that cast."

"What were you going to say?" asked Mary Machin. "If the unfortunate girl did not kill herself——"

"Why then it is obvious that she was killed by some one else, Miss Machin."

"No, no," said Téphany in horror. She suddenly remembered Michael's word "crime." Then instinct, the memory of their friendship, rose in revolt. She murmured faintly: "I can't believe that, I can't."

Keats betrayed his surprise at her agitation with a whimsical twist of his mouth. Then, very quickly, he jumped upon a chair and unhooked the cast from its nail. Carne saw that Téphany was trembling.

"Lock it up, Johnnie," he said, "or we shan't have the pleasure of seeing Miss Lane here again."

Keats nodded; being a Californian, he was very chivalrous. He crossed the room, dropped the cast into the empty fire-place, and crushed it beneath his foot.

"Oh!" Téphany exclaimed.

"There's an end of that," said Johnnie cheerfully. "I don't mind confessing, now, that the thing has haunted me a bit. You will come again, won't you?"

"Yes," said Téphany, in a low voice.

She walked out of the room, followed by Mary Machin. Carne whistled expressively.

"A creature of sensibility," said he; then he added slowly, "like all artists." His emphasis of the last word challenged attention.

"She calls herself an amateur."

"She is Marie de Lautrec, the new singer, whom we missed in Milan."

"Jee—whiz!"

"It is plain that for some reason or other she wishes to remain *incognita*."

"Then we mustn't let on that we're in the know?"

"Not yet. She's Bretonne, and, as she put it, Bretonne bretonnante!"

"Clever as she can stick too," said Mr. Keats very solemnly; "but Miss Machin is one of the daisiest girls I ever met."

CHAPTER VIII

YANNIK

Pâle comme un beau soir d'automne.

A BRITTANY Pardon combines what is essentially secular and material with what is as essentially spiritual and religious, defining religion in its elemental sense as the relation between the Creator and the created. A Breton goes to a Pardon to demand of his Maker, through the intercession of a saint—whose name, by the way, is not always found in the calendar—a particular grace, and to get a skinful of liquor. At Rosporden, for instance, Our Lady is entreated to vouchsafe good news from those abroad to those at home. The mothers and sisters of the men who are serving France in her navy or army flock to Rosporden because they believe firmly that this good news will come if they are faithful in paying their vows. If the good news does not come, consolation lingers in the conviction that so many years of purgatorial pains will be cancelled.

The Pardon of St. Pierre de Riec is held for the more general purpose of beseeching the

Keeper of the Keys to open the gates of Paradise.¹ At Riec, therefore, the observant traveller will note the presence of more men than he is likely to see at Rosporden. Some iconoclasts admit, with a sly wink, that in these latter days the saint has become niggardly. A tailor, chatting confidently with Clinton Carne, remarked that he had read of leaguers fighting for their faith in the troublous times of Henri IV. who had been rewarded with indulgences extending over a period of more than a million years. “That—name of a pig! —was something more than a drop in the ocean of eternity, whereas a beggarly seven years——! But, *saperlipopette!* one must take in this world what one gets with a humble and grateful heart.”

In the morning masses had been said in the spacious church, whose spire is a landmark for many miles, and used as such by fishermen seeking the sanctuary of the river on stormy winter days. How many lives has that spire saved? Inside the grey building a few women were kneeling, with eyes fixed upon the figure of the Saviour above the high altar, telling their beads and murmuring their prayers. They came and went silently, passing from the peace of the cool twilight of the nave into the glare and turmoil of the street beyond. In the market-place booths had been erected, gay with bunting, and filled with simple wares: cheap jewellery, rosaries, candles, toys for the

¹ *La grace d'aller au Paradis.*

children, and like fairings. Cakes and sweet-stuff lay in huge piles. Opposite the great west door of the church, the piper and fifer were playing in front of a tavern. Between the tavern and the church long lines of men and women were dancing the gavotte. The leader, a sturdy fellow on leave from his ship, with a face burnt brown in China seas, wound in serpentine curves up and down the road ; the others followed his erratic course quite gravely and almost solemnly, as if they were conscious that they were dancing in front of God's house, and that the dance was part of the day's ritual, and no more to be shirked than the High Mass of the morning. Within the tavern everybody was drinking cider or beer. The girls and women who lacked partners for the gavotte looked on impassively, yet with a faint wistfulness in their dreaming eyes.

Carne dived into the tavern, and returned with two chairs. He said that he had ordered some bottled cider, which presently was brought and uncorked. Not without difficulty Machie was persuaded to have a glass. To sit and drink in a public thoroughfare, close to a church, and to the sound of pipe and fife, seemed an outrageous breach of the proprieties. She eyed nervously a tall young Frenchman with a camera, who looked as if he were contemplating a snapshot. Téphany assured her that they were doing the correct thing, and that the cider was very refreshing. After

the cider was drunk, the Californian urged Miss Machin to take a turn at the seemingly unending gavotte. Machie refusing, he asked Téphany, who, after a moment's hesitation, seized his hand and joined the dancers. Miss Machin watched them with her pleasant eyes wide open. She was staring at a Téphany she had never seen before. When the dance ended Carne came back, calling for more cider, but Téphany had disappeared.

"She knows some of these people," said Carne, wiping his forehead. "How hot it is! We are to sit here till Miss Lane comes back."

He proceeded to entertain his companion with a clever description of other Pardons, notably one for a special grace against mad dogs.

"Are there mad dogs in Brittany?" said Machie, allowing her mind to hasten back to Daffodil Mansions.

"Oh, dear, no," Carne replied. "How could there be when these Pardons provide against them, Miss Machin?"

Miss Machin looked at his curly head—he had removed his panama—and sighed.

"You know," she said maternally, "I don't like you so much when you sneer at these nice people."

"Sneer?" He opened wide his keen grey eyes. "My dear Miss Machin, I don't sneer at them."

"But you do," she replied, with finality.

"If you say another word I shall burst into

tears," replied the Californian. "Hullo ! here's a bard."

Miss Machie looked up.

"Oh ! I have seen that man before." Her eyes brightened. "I passed him between here and Nivéz. He was kneeling in front of a roadside Calvary, singing his songs."

"That would make a good picture," said Carne reflectively.

"Does your art always come first ?"

Carne did not answer. The bard, a familiar figure at such festivals, approached. In his hand he carried a sheaf of cheap songs. By the sale of these and such small change as the crowd gave him, he earned his living. Of the men he was the only one who wore the genuine costume of Cornouailles : the baggy breeches (*bragous bras*), the high-frilled collar, and the short black cloth jacket, embellished with tarnished silver embroidery. In a shrill but not unmusical voice he began to sing a weird apostrophe to oaks and seas and blood :

Of blood, and wine, and dance, I sing :

To thee, O Sun ! all hail !

Hail, flame of fire ! Hail, flash of steel !

Ye waves, ye oaks ! ye lands and seas !

All hail !

The crowd listened attentively, with a respectful appreciation which impressed Mary Machin. When the bard had sung, the Californian gave a franc to him, and bought a

couple of songs. Machie had already noted that the young fellow was generous. But then he seemed to have plenty of money, and Johnnie Keats had told Téphany that Carne's sire was a rich man. Machie noted also that the painter's clothes were well cut, and his boots of the best. He had nothing of the so-called Bohemian about him. Michael Ossory, on the other hand, looked shabby and shaggy. But this did not trouble Machie, because already she had made up her mind that her dearest Téphany had lost interest in the lover of her salad days. And if this curly-headed Californian was going to be famous, and if he were as nice as he looked, why shouldn't Téphany fall in love with him?

Meantime, the piper and his companion, having refreshed themselves with cider, were about to shift their ground and move on to a tavern farther down the street. Some of the girls who had been dancing slipped into the church to patter an Ave or a Credo; their partners came out of the tavern, wiping their mouths and laughing.

"By Jove!" Carne exclaimed. A girl in the Pont-Aven coif was picking her way through the crowd. "This one is a beauty," he added.

Beneath the fluttering coif one could see brilliant colouring, the milk-and-rose complexion so rare amongst maidens who from early infancy expose their faces to sun and wind. The other girls, gazing wide-eyed at

this dainty stranger, looked like squaws beside her.

"Why, it's Téphany," gasped Mary Machin.

"Well," said Téphany, a moment later to Carne, "you said you wanted to see me in the costume, and here I am—quite ready for another gavotte."

"You're the eighth wonder of the world," said Carne.

Téphany laughed.

"Isn't she, Miss Machin?"

"I planned this little surprise," Téphany explained. "Machie, you are shocked."

"My dear! Before all these rough people?"

"They are my people, and they aren't rough. They like to see me in this." She touched her heavy black skirt with its rows of velvet bands and her filmy apron.

"Who wouldn't?" said Carne.

"Let us dance," said Téphany.

Farther down the street arose the wild skirl of the pipes. Machie, shaking her head, followed Téphany and Carne till they joined the dancers below the market-place, where the crowd was very thick. Carne held out his hand, and away they went, Téphany's small feet twinkling under her heavy skirt.

"Stunning pair!" said Johnnie Keats, who had joined Miss Machin. "Clinton is doing his fancy steps and hitting up the pace. And there's the Hermit, looking as if he had a pain."

In the heart of the crowd stood Michael,

tall and gaunt—half a head taller, half a foot broader than the peasants about him.

“So it is,” said Mary Machin, wondering if Téphany had seen him.

Téphany, however, had not seen Michael. In putting on the costume of the country she seemed to have assumed also the character and temperament of the pleasure-adoring Pont-Aven girls. Carne, an opportunist, like all Westerners, was making himself agreeable. He talked with animation ; Téphany listened, smiling. For the moment she had become a child of fifteen again. In the old days she had danced the gavotte scores of times ; and she had often worn the costume, which suited her slender, delicately modelled figure to perfection. Above the pipes and fife she could hear the shrill voice of the bard, singing another *gwierz*. Her heart beat fiercely against her ribs, and Carne’s beat as fiercely.

“How glorious it is to be young !” he whispered.

At this moment Téphany caught sight of Michael steadily watching her with his mournful eyes.

“Oh !” Téphany exclaimed.

“Have I hurt you ?” Carne inquired tenderly.

“No, no ; but when we get to the end we will stop.”

Carne noticed that the animation had gone out of her voice, the sparkle out of her eyes. He had not seen Michael, and if he had he

would not have connected the sudden change in Téphany to his presence. He supposed that, possibly, she was tired or giddy. Certainly the sun beat down with overpowering strength. He drew his partner into the shade of a tree and offered to fetch a chair. Téphany nodded wearily.

So Michael had seen her. Why had he come to Riec? Of course, after what had passed between them only twenty-four hours ago he must think her heartless. During a restless, miserable night, she had convinced herself that the mask, evidently a familiar object with many artists, had been bought by Michael because it resembled some Vannetais siren—for so Téphany jealously regarded her—who had lured Michael into sin and crime. Behind this obvious explanation gibbered the ghastly fear of an identity being established between the lovely creature who was found dead in the Seine and the woman who had stood between her and her lover. At this point Téphany's tortured speculations became paralysed. Later, she fell asleep. And when she woke, in the freshness of a midsummer's morning, she vowed passionately that she would turn her back to the shadows. Notwithstanding this vow, at the first glimpse of Michael's face, the shadows had obscured the sunbeams. What an irony life was, to be sure! When Carne hurried up with a chair, Téphany was almost rude to him.

However, she sat down, and Carne stood

beside her, smiling pleasantly and watching the dancers. In particular he stared at the girls, in the hope of finding the perfect model, which all painters are seeking and which so few find. Téphany felt that her absurd resentment was slipping away under cover of his silence. It was tactful and understanding of him to say nothing. Had he divined that she wished to be left alone for a few minutes?

But she soon became impatient, not of silence, but of sitting still. She wondered if Michael had left his place in the crowd. Was he alone? Should she speak to him? Explanations were usually so tiresome and fatuous. She jumped up.

“Let us move!”

“Dance or walk?” Carne demanded gravely.

“Walk, please.”

Not without difficulty they threaded a way through the crowd, gradually approaching the spot where Michael had been standing. He had disappeared. Téphany walked hither and thither with Carne upon pretence of seeing the booths and the people, but she was searching for Michael. She encountered Père Narcisse who greeted her warmly, but she did not like to ask him if he had seen Michael. Moreover, by this time she was convinced that Michael had left the Pardon.

Coming back to the market-place, they met Machie and Johnnie Keats, and a change of partners took place. Téphany wandered away with Keats, leaving Carne with Mary Machin.

The Satellite, as usual, began to speak of his Sun.

"Clinton and you were iridescent," he began.

Téphany laughed; then, seriously, she asked him: "Don't you ever talk about yourself, Mr. Keats?"

Asking the question, she examined him attentively. Decidedly he was very plain; but he had blue eyes, of a fine quality, with a self-depreciatory twinkle deep down in them. His face was red. It seemed to Téphany that the poor fellow had blushed so often and so violently on account of his many shortcomings that the blush, so to speak, had become permanent.

"Talk about myself?—no," he answered. "Say, Miss Lane, if you had my name—John Keats, think of it!—and face, would you talk about yourself, eh?" He did not wait for her reply, but continued, in his drawling, Western nasal slang: "It's like this, I'm one of the big crowd that has to eat soup with a fork. When Clinton and I first joined Julien's, the American boys in the studio christened us Hit and Miss. Smart, that?"

"Unkind, and I dare say untrue."

"Not a bit. Hit and Miss: that just describes Clinton and me. Same sort of outfit, you and Miss Machin, eh? She's missed it, I reckon, so far as the big things of life count."

"The big things?" Téphany nodded reflectively. Certainly a parallel could be established

between Carne and his satellite, and herself and Machie. "But Mr. Keats, do the big things, the big successes, count much? Miss Machin is one of the happiest women I know, and you don't look very miserable."

"I'm as happy as a clam," said Mr. Keats. "Great Minneapolis! What's this?"

He looked disgustedly at an old woman, who had reeled round the corner, very drunk, with her coif disordered and her fluted collar crumpled and dirty. She was laughing and singing.

"It's Mère Pouldour," said Téphany, "Oh, dear!"

"You know her? Hadn't we better slide off? She's got an awful load."

"Poor thing, poor thing!" Téphany murmured. "How she has changed! She won't recognise me. But she ought to have some one to look after her."

"Looks as if she had," said Keats.

As he spoke a girl came running round the corner. She caught the old woman by the elbow, steadied her, and began to speak rapidly in Breton.

"What a peach!" exclaimed the young man.

The girl was of a type seldom seen in Finistère, but not uncommon in the Léonnais country. Although she had that pale creamy skin which sometimes indicates an anæmic condition, she seemed to be healthy and vigorous. Her eyes, set rather far apart, were

amazingly fine, of a golden hazel; her hair, such as could be seen of it, was of the true Titian red.

“What a peach!” repeated Johnnie. Meantime, the girl had persuaded the old woman to sit down upon a granite step. The song died quavering upon the loose wrinkled lips, the hands, gesticulating violently a moment before, sank upon the stained apron. Obviously, Mère Pouldour had sunk into a stupor as soon as she sat down. The girl deftly arranged the disordered coif and collar, patting them back into shape with delicate movements of her fingers.

“Wish Clinton could see her,” murmured Keats.

“Let us speak to her,” said Téphany.

The girl looked up, frightened and shy, when she saw a man, a foreigner, approaching, but she smiled at Téphany, who addressed her in French, while her eye roamed inquiringly over the details of Téphany’s costume. She looked slightly puzzled. Mère Pouldour was snoring comfortably.

“I knew Mère Pouldour some years ago,” said Téphany. “She used to live in a cottage at Ros Braz, on the estuary.”

“She lives there still.”

“And you?”

“I am Yannik, her granddaughter. I live with her.”

“Alone?”

“Yes.”

"Then the old man, your grandfather, is dead?"

"He died long ago, and my father is dead, and my two uncles. They were lobster-fishing, all of them, and two others and the boy, off the Glénans islands." She pointed to the north-west. "Well, it came on to blow suddenly. And—" She shrugged her delicate shoulders, sighed, and crossed herself. Then she added quickly: "Grand'mère took to *la goutte* after that. She had always drunk cider till then, which hurts nobody."

"I am so sorry, so very sorry," said Téphany.

"It is misery; yes. But, what would you? There are others worse off than us. Grand'mère earns money during the black months gathering the *goémon*" (the seaweed collected in January and February), "and I earn money, too."

Téphany looked rather surprised. Yannik's hands were neither red nor coarse of texture; her face was untanned. How then did she earn money? As if reading the question Téphany was too polite to ask, the girl said quietly: "I work with my needle; in fact, I dress dolls in the costume. My dolls sell well"—she held up her head proudly—"and in the season it is a good business. Mademoiselle Yvonne is very kind. She sends me her clients."

"But what are you going to do now?" Téphany glanced at the grandmother.

"In a couple of hours she will be able to

go home. We may get a lift. People are kind."

"The peachiest of peaches!" murmured Johnnie Keats; "I'm a jay if I ever saw a better model. Wonder whether she'd pose." Then, in very ill-pronounced French, he addressed Yannik, who informed him that she didn't understand a word of English. Keats glanced ruefully at Téphany.

"She don't look as if she was corn-fed," he growled; "and the season hasn't begun yet. Guess she's overstocked with dolls. Please ask her if she'd pose for the head and coif, Miss Lane."

Téphany did so.

"Pose? Never!"

She glared at poor Johnnie, who kept growling on in English: "For the head, you silly little girl, for the head, nothing else, for —the—head." He tapped his own head, showing his teeth in a genial smile.

"Never!" the girl repeated.

"I'm going to have one of your dolls, any way. May be two. *Poupay—eh?* *Un—deux.*"

She understood, and smiled.

"Monsieur is very kind."

Téphany also expressing a wish to buy dolls, it was arranged that Yannik should bring some specimens of her handicraft to Pont-Aven after the mid-day meal upon the following afternoon. But when Téphany suggested sending the grandmother home in a cart Yannik protested.

"Indeed, Mademoiselle"—she had perceived that Téphany was dressed up—"indeed, I am accustomed to this. It happens, but always, always, at the Pardons."

"You ought to try and persuade your grandmother not to go to the Pardons."

Yannik answered simply : "But the others, Mademoiselle, our men, who died out there. And unconfessed. Naturally we attend the Pardons."

"Naturally," repeated Téphany.

Keats and she moved reluctantly on, leaving the girl standing erect, slightly defiant, beside the old woman. Téphany looked back twice, waving her hand encouragingly. Yannik maintained her impassive, indifferent pose ; but she smiled faintly ; the smile was a sad thing to see.

"I'm going to load up on dolls," declared Keats. "This is the psychological moment, Miss Lane. I'll bet a dollar there's a slump in dolls."

"Mr. Keats," said Téphany, in a voice he did not recognise. Then peering into her face, he saw that she was deeply moved.

"I'm at your service, Miss Lane."

"That poor old woman was once so good and respectable. I—I can't bear to think of her sitting there. It makes me wretched. If we could hire a cart—"

"But we can," said the young man, cheerily. "We'll hire a dozen, Miss Lane. Don't you worry. You just leave this thing to me. I'm great on transportation. Why, I always look

out Clinton's trains—and arrange everything. Not a word. I'll leave you first with Miss Machin."

"Thank you; I'll slip back to the house where I changed. If you will find the cart—but oh——!"

"Anything wrong?"

"Nothing—except your French."

Keats chuckled.

"Now, that's unkind, Miss Lane. But I'll tell you something: my French is like my face—all wrong, as you say—but I worry through with it all right. See! I'll have that cart around before you are into that pretty organdie frock of yours."

"Good gracious! How did you know it was an organdie?"

"I know lots of things," said the young man solemnly. "Clinton says my head's full of odds and ends not worth the powder to blow 'em to Tophet. Sort o' rubbish heap."

"I'm going carefully over that rubbish heap," said Téphany, laughing at his comically rueful countenance.

But, changing her dress, she reflected sadly that the two incidents of unexpectedly meeting Michael and Mère Pouldour had spoiled the afternoon's comedy, which she had planned so gaily several days before. The change in them made her wretched. And as for the story about the old woman earning money, she didn't believe a word of it. Little Yannik,

with her pretty pale face, and her slender clever fingers, was obviously the only wage-earner in that family. Dwelling upon this and the bitterness in Michael's eyes, she asked herself if she regretted having returned to Pont-Aven. After all, the attempt to rehabilitate herself with old ideas, old memories, simple pleasures, and the like, was somewhat on a par with this dressing up in the costume of the province : an amusing thing to do to while away a few minutes, nothing more.

When she walked out into the street, she found the rest of the party awaiting her. The Satellite hailed her with a cheery "I've corralled a cart and carter, Miss Lane. And I've told Clinton that he's missed a peach."

" You are such an impassioned optimist," said Carne. " Where is the peach ? "

" She's on her way home. I hustled, I can tell you." He looked at Téphany, who smiled her appreciation of his efforts ; then he turned to his friend : " You'll see her to-morrow, old man ; she's coming to Pont-Aven to sell us dolls."

CHAPTER IX

TÉPHANY IS SEVERE

Les petits sabots des petits Bretons,
Petites Bretonnes,
Chantent des chansons en différents tons,
Jamais monotones—*Toc, toc!*
Chers petits sabots des petits Bretons
Trop tôt l'on vous quitte :
Des petits Bretons les petits petons
Grandissent trop vite ! *Toc, toc!*
Dansez, petits sabots !

MICHAEL was painting upon the Rosporden road. He had chosen for his subject the view of Pont-Aven from the top of the hill. Michael, caring nothing for the manufacture of pictures, had disposed of the foreground with a score of bold strokes. For nearly a week now he had been intent upon the middle distance, the houses grouped about the church, the river, and the quay ; and for a week the weather, so often fickle in June, had behaved perfectly. Each morning the sun rose out of the mists, fought with and put them to flight, and then swam slowly up into cloudless skies.

Michael had set himself the task of reproducing the effect of this resplendent sunshine upon grey buildings. In a word, he was

endeavouring to paint the golden glow emanating from objects, colourless in themselves, which have been exposed to heat and light. The neutral tints of granite walls and slate roofs had become saturated with brilliant colours, so delicately interwoven, so tenderly combined and contrasted, that Michael, who preferred to use large tools, was obliged to experiment with small sable and camel's-hair brushes. Although he had spoken of himself to Téphany as an impressionist, he worked doggedly faithful to rules which he had formulated after years of patient study such as this. Pure sunlight falling upon an opaque object like granite or slate could only be translated in one way; light reflected instead of transmitted falling upon the same object at a different angle produced a startlingly different effect; add to these complexities the ineffable confusion produced by cross lights and shadows, and you will dimly understand the difficulties which fanned Michael Ossory's ardour to white heat.

Behind Michael, watching every stroke with intent, intelligent glance, stood Carne, quite willing to acknowledge himself disciple to such a master. At the same time, in his keen mind, so American in its plasticity, so eager first to adopt and then to adapt whatever might be of value, lay reservations. Michael could do many things which were beyond the Californian's powers, but he lacked the gift of ordering his amazing experience and

technique. With them, in fact, he generally produced chaos. Sensible of this, Carne felt a certain contempt for Michael, both as man and painter. As he had said in his incisive slang, Michael was a crank, a freak, a man who subordinated the real to the ideal, who pursued will-o'-the-wisps in a wilderness. Measuring Michael with his own foot-rule, he found him bigger than he had expected, but by no means a giant.

Meantime, one thing was certain : he could learn much from this crank, who seemed willing to impart what he had acquired by years of patient experiment.

"There!" said Michael. He rose from his camp-stool and stretched his long limbs.

Carne compared the copy with the original, half shutting his eyes, narrowing the pupils of them, like a cat.

"Yes," he said, in a low voice, "you've made those old walls speak. And you've captured the atmosphere."

Michael nodded.

"We aim at truth and miss it, because we cannot see the target clearly. Your eyes are not what they will be in a few years."

Then, very deliberately, he took his palette knife and with one sweep scraped off the work of an hour.

"Oh!"

Michael laughed.

"You wouldn't have done that?"

"No."

Carne drew a long breath; when he spoke his voice had a clear, sincere ring in it, very pleasant to hear.

"It was the best bit, bar none, that I've seen this year."

Michael eyed him attentively, with a gaze so piercing that the younger man slightly flushed.

"You may go far," he said curtly.

Carne had been told this by many men, some of them famous, but, coming from Michael, the simple words gave him an extraordinary sense of gratification.

"I hope so," he answered honestly. "I can say to you, Ossory, what perhaps you have guessed already, that my work means much to me."

"Ah!"

Michael frowned, seeing Téphany's radiant face in the gavotte of the previous afternoon. At that moment he had leaped to the conclusion that Téphany was irresistibly attracted to the American, who, surely, was well equipped to win and hold the love of such a woman. At that moment also Téphany met his eyes and interpreted so wrongly their message.

"I am not indifferent to other excellent things," murmured Carne, "but success as a painter is vital, you understand, vital."

Michael seemed to remember having used this very phrase himself, years ago. Then he laughed again.

"If you think it vital it is vital," he said. "I thought so once."

"And you—you think so no longer?"

Michael answered steadily:

"I paint as a distraction." Then, in a different voice, he continued: "I saw you at Riec yesterday."

"Yes, yes; I make a point of attending these Pardons. One never knows, one may come across something good, eh? But yesterday held surprises. Miss Lane put on the costume—"

He began to talk of Téphany, betraying his interest and admiration. An Englishman, during those rare minutes when he is speaking of his love, is generally at his stupidest; an American, and a Western American in particular, is never so fluent, so natural, as when he is praising the woman who attracts him. When he paused, Michael said slowly:

"You are certainly not indifferent to other excellent things."

"Ah! Ossory, you can make a shrewd guess why I'm keener than ever about my work. In our country every man worth a snap wants to offer the woman he loves something worth her acceptance. My two brothers have married stunning girls, but they pegged away as bachelors till they'd got out of Short Street into Easy Avenue. See!"

"I see," replied Ossory.

Carne shouldered his own paint-box and umbrella and strode away whistling; Michael began to paint in, for the tenth time, the sunlit roofs beneath him. Like most men who live

alone with their own thoughts, he sometimes spoke to himself. In a moment he growled out: "Is he good enough?" Then, as if conscious of what he would regard as an infirmity, he closed his lips and concentrated his attention upon his work.

That morning Téphany had set up her easel opposite a row of poplars, which threw soft shadows upon the pool where Mère le Beuz was washing some linen. Further down the Aven Machie was trying to persuade a child to sit still. Three or four children in sabots clattered to and fro between the ladies, presenting themselves as models. Beside Mère le Beuz knelt two young girls, whose brown arms moved as quickly as their tongues. They were beating wet linen upon smooth flat stones, laughing and chattering to each other in Breton.

Téphany squeezed some colours upon her palette, and then smiled half-deprecatingly at an ever-increasing reluctance to begin work. A delicious languor pervaded this cool, sequestered spot: the more irresistible because others had to toil, whereas Téphany could take her ease. Accordingly, she sat down upon a mossy bank, dreamily absorbing the scents and sounds of this corner of Arcadia. The girls nudged each other and giggled. Doubtless Mademoiselle was thinking of the handsome young man with whom she had danced the gavotte at Riec.

A few yards up the river the water was streaming in a miniature cascade over a mill-dam. It was here that a girl had been found drowned. Whether the poor creature had met death by accident or design stirred the tongues of the gossips. Téphany remembered quite well that the grove of oaks behind the dam in which the girl had last been seen alive had earned an evil reputation. The drowned girl—so it was said at the time—met the Ankou face to face, just where the oaks threw their blackest shadows. . . .

Téphany called to Mère le Beuz.

“ You knew poor Séraphine Coadic ? ”

Mère le Beuz looked up.

“ Ah, yes ; the unfortunate ! Well, by the blessing of God Séraphine was buried in holy ground.”

“ And if she had not been so buried ? ” demanded Téphany, scenting one of the innumerable legends concerning the dead.

“ The Vannetais people believe that those unfortunates who are drowned and whose bodies are not recovered become evil spirits, who mock the living. You may hear them wail at twilight : ‘ *Iou—Iou—Iou !* ’ ”

The girls, Rozenn and Francine, crossed themselves.

“ If you answer back,” continued Mère le Beuz, not unmindful of the impression she was making, “ the evil spirit, *le berger de nuit*, the Vannetais call it,” again the girls crossed themselves, “ divides with one huge bound the

distance between you and it; if you answer back twice, it leaps again still nearer; if you answer for the third time, it breaks your neck!"

"You have faith in that, *ma tante*?"

Mère le Beuz shrugged her broad shoulders.

"*Ma Doué*," she replied with emphasis, "true or not, I should not be such a fool as to answer back more than once."

Téphany turned to one of the girls.

"And you, Francine, do you believe in the Ankou?"

Thus addressed, Francine's brown cheeks flushed. The girl beside her laughed nervously.

"Do I believe in the Ankou?" Francine repeated the question to gain time. "Why, no, Mademoiselle. That," she shrugged her shoulders, "is an old wives' tale. I do not believe in any such rubbish." Then, as her companion gave an expressive gasp of incredulity, she added sharply: "Rozenn believes in the Ankou, Mademoiselle."

"Thou liest," said Rozenn calmly. Téphany laughed.

A sharp verbal encounter followed, each girl accusing the other of superstition and credulity. Mère le Beuz exclaimed in a loud, authoritative voice: "Hold your foolish tongues, both of you! Old wives, as you say, believe in the Ankou, and old wives are wiser than young maids."

"And old widows wisest of all," pouted Rozenn, who began to beat her linen very hard.

Téphany laughed again, reflecting that the rising generation in Pont-Aven had not changed much. Hearing the sound of voices raised in hot discussion, the children had scampered up to stand in a solemn row in front of the women. At the grim name, Ankou, each little face had assumed a mysterious immobility, as if stiffened into terror. One tiny girl, a baby of five, but dressed like a woman, put fat fingers into her round eyes. Téphany comforted her with a sou. The child's sister, a tall, lanky girl, with a distressing cough, said hoarsely : " Mademoiselle, I, yes I, have seen Pot Scoutan."

" Who hasn't seen Pot Scoutan ? " cried the other children.

Pot Scoutan, accounted for as a purely natural phenomenon, is a marsh light frequently seen hovering near the mud flats and moorland of the estuary, but the credulous believe it to be a spirit of evil. Again Téphany reflected that if the men of Pont-Aven had abandoned the picturesque *bragous bras* and embroidered jacket, their minds certainly were still swathed in the legends and traditions of the ancient province. Then she picked up her palette, and asked the fat-fingered little child if she would pose.

" And me, too," urged the lanky sister. " See, Mademoiselle, I will take the little one in my lap, and you can make a beautiful picture of us, and call it Maternal Love."

" Thou art an original," said Téphany, struck

by the girl's quickness of wit. Possibly she was repeating some phrase heard from the mouth of an artist. "I will try to draw the little one. Sit by her and keep her still!"

A minute later she was at work. The child was posed with her back against a beech trunk; the sister murmured endearing phrases in her rasping voice: "Oh, how good thou art! What an angel—so quiet, so pretty! The Holy Mother will bless thee, and Mademoiselle will give thee sous. We shall eat cakes, thou and I—"

The sun was now approaching the zenith. The wonderful June glow, which Michael was trying to reproduce, fell softly upon the pool. Out of the shadows where Téphany was drawing, looking past the silvery trunks of the beeches, one could see a golden haze scintillating above the water. The women had washed their linen, and were spreading it out upon the grass in the field between the poplars and the pool. The tiny model fell asleep.

"Don't wake her," whispered Téphany. "I'll make another sketch."

The elder sister nodded, and closed her own eyes.

Presently, into this earthly paradise strolled Carne, whistling gaily. He had found nothing to attract him, and in consequence was returning to his studio. His whistling woke the child, and put to flight Téphany's peaceful thoughts. Slightly exasperated, she told

herself that the Californian was a disturbing element. He and his restless nation permitted nobody to work in peace. Carne greeted her cheerily, and looked at her drawing.

"Terribly bad," said Téphany.

"But, by the prophet! you've caught the feeling. Dash it all, why didn't I join you earlier? Now the morning's gone. What a cute kid!"

"Cute? That's the last word I'd use."

"The cunningest little darling!" He had not heard Téphany's muttered criticism.

"Cute? Cunning? How very American you are, Mr. Carne!"

This time he paid attention, regarding her sharply, sensible of a note of petulance in her voice.

"Why, of course," he answered seriously. "You don't blame me, do you, for being an American?"

"Oh, you can't help it."

"I'm very proud of it. All the same, I rather flatter myself that I don't rush madly about waving the star-spangled banner." He smiled with sudden perception of her mood. "But I've rushed in here, I see, inopportunely. Forgive me!"

He looked so sincerely sorry that Téphany melted at once.

"Sit down, and tell me my mistakes."

"You mean it? I'll run if you say so. I know what it is to have tactless bores blundering in upon one."

"Sit down," repeated Téphany, moving her skirts.

The young man laughed gaily, and flung himself beside her. Instantly, he seemed to become part of the scene, and not the least part. His exuberant vitality, his youth and good looks, manifested the very spirit of Spring. Téphany listened to his criticisms, but her eyes took note of his cool, clean, grey clothes, his spotless linen, his general air of freshness and sanity. The model showed signs of being tired, despite the encouragement of her sister.

Carne said in French :

"Thou hast posed to perfection, my fat little hen, and thou must pose for me."

The child nodded, but said nothing.

"Whenever Monsieur pleases," the sister answered.

Carne eyed the thin, lanky, slovenly dressed creature with a slight frown.

"Oh ! you must come too, eh ? "

"Babette wouldn't come without me—would'st thou, my heart's delight ? "

Babette shook her head. And then followed a significant incident. Smiling confidently, Carne began to challenge the baby's interest and affection. Téphany listened to the pleasant inflections of his voice, wondering whether the tiny woman could resist him.

"Babette isn't afraid of *me*." He held out his hands. "Oh, no, no. And if Babette comes to me I will give her goodies, and perhaps a lovely coif. Come, my chicken, come."

"Not without me," said the sister stubbornly. Téphany felt that a duel between two wills was about to take place. Which would win—the vigorous, clever man, or the frail, ignorant peasant?

Blandishment fell from the Californian's lips. Babette showed dimples, but no inclination to move.

"I might make you my own little girl," said Carne. "And if you lived with me you would eat white bread and galette every day, and play with a lovely doll, and sleep in a bed with blue curtains—"

"Babette would sooner remain in misery with me, Monsieur."

"I would give thee a frock, white, such as girls, *big* girls, wear at their first communion, and red shoes. Come with me, Babette!"

"She prefers to remain—in misery, with me."

Babette held out a pudgy hand to her sister, nodding solemnly.

"Don't believe she understands," said Carne disgustedly.

"Ah, but she understands perfectly," exclaimed the sister. "Dost thou not, my angel?"

Again Babette nodded, but her lips began to quiver and pout.

"That will do," said Téphany hastily. She gave her model some sous, and then, after an instant's hesitation, slipped a piece of silver into the lean hand of the sister.

"You are good and kind," she said seriously.
"Come here again to-morrow!"

"May Mademoiselle be blessed a thousand times," said the girl fervently. She snatched up Babette and made off, throwing a triumphant, mocking glance at Carne, for Babette was all smiles and dimples. Carne, however, accepted defeat with true American fortitude. He laughed; but he added gravely: "You know, Miss Lane, I'm not often defeated."

"Defeat is wholesome, sometimes," said Téphany. "Isn't it almost half-past twelve?"

"Yes," said Carne, consulting his watch; "and I'm famished."

"Making love in vain has not taken away your appetite. Really, you were almost irresistible."

"The hard-hearted little baggage!"

"Be fair! You made no impression upon that dear little heart, because it is so soft."

After breakfast, when Téphany, Mary Machin, and the Californians were drinking their coffee under the trees in front of the inn, Yannik appeared, carrying a large parcel of dolls. Johnnie Keats was the first to see her.

"The peach for dessert," he drawled, glancing at Carne out of the corner of his kind, whimsical eyes.

"Phew-w-w-w!" Carne whistled.

Yannik came forward.

She looked very pale, as if the long walk beneath the June sun, upon a day when there

was not breeze enough to stir the tremulous leaves of the poplars, had tired her. But this expression of slight fatigue, of a weariness of the spirit, perhaps, rather than of the body, gave an added charm to her delicately modelled features. The fine nose, with its thin curved nostrils, indicated extraordinary sensibility and yet gentleness; the mouth beneath was very red, taking from the face any suspicion of ill-health. Her great lustrous eyes sparkled at the sight of Téphany, now dressed *en demoiselle*, and then, passing over both Keats and Mary Machin, shone steadily upon Carne, who was leaning forward, obviously surprised and delighted. Instantly, Téphany perceived that the lines and curves in Yannik's face had aroused a somewhat similar enthusiasm as was aroused in him by the waving weeds and rippling curves of the pool in the Bois d'Amour. Quite unconsciously he welcomed what he was admiring with a warm, radiant smile. Yannik smiled too, her lips parting, slightly drooping at the corners, showing her small white teeth.

"Here I am," she said simply, with a dignity not at all rare in Breton maidens.

Téphany inquired after Mère Pouldour, and Keats greeted Yannik genially, begging her to sit down, offering her coffee or lemonade. She refused politely but shyly. Then, Carne, speaking for the first time, said positively: "The road is dusty, I am going to order you a grenadine: you must drink it."

When it came she drank it; but, as she was

raising the glass to her lips, Carne lifted his glass of cognac.

“*Yerr matt!*” he said, which is Breton for “Here’s luck !”

Yannik smiled again slowly.

“*Yerr matt!*” she replied.

“Am I an impassioned optimist ?” demanded Keats.

“But you say she won’t pose,” whispered Carne.

“Not for me. Try your luck, old man !”

“She shall pose.”

Having drunk her grenadine, Yannik untied the parcel, and displayed with pride her dolls. She had brought six, and sold them at her own price—a modest one—in less than six minutes. Her object accomplished, she rose to go amid general protestation.

“I am wanted at home, Monsieur.”

It was curious that she addressed Carne.

“Don’t be in such a hurry ! It’s not very kind of you when we want to help you, to be your friends.”

“Monsieur is very good.”

She cast down her eyes, blushing slightly beneath the intent glance of the young man.

“My friend here,” Carne indicated Johnnie, “tells me that you do not pose, as so many girls here do.”

“Pose ? No, Monsieur.”

Téphany remembered the “Never !” which had burst from her lips the afternoon before.

“Why not, Yannik ?”

As he pronounced her quaint name, his voice softened delightfully. Mary Machin beamed at him; Johnnie Keats grinned sympathetically; only Téphany looked grave.

“Why not, Monsieur?” She shrugged her shoulders, and played nervously with her apron.

“Have you a good reason?”

“Not a reason that Monsieur would call good, perhaps.”

“For a few sittings, just the head and hands, I would pay more than you make over a dozen dolls.”

Yannik did not reply. Her eyes left the speaker’s eager face, and wandered across the street.

“Ah!” she exclaimed, cleverly changing the subject, “there is Monsieur Ossory.”

The others glanced round. Michael was coming out of Barbarin’s shop, where tobacco and artists’ materials are sold.

“Do you know Monsieur Ossory?” Téphany asked in some surprise.

“Do I know him? but perfectly.” She blushed slightly, and added: “My cousin, Léon Bourhis, looks after his boat at Ros Braz.”

Michael, seeing the ladies, lifted his cap, and was passing on, when Carne hailed him:

“Say, Ossory! Won’t you join us?”

Michael hesitated, meeting Téphany’s eyes, reading in them a curious entreaty. Then, with a slight shrug of his broad shoulders, he

crossed the street. Carne pressed him to drink a cup of coffee or a liqueur. Michael refused both, but accepted a cigarette.

"This young woman says she knows you," said Carne. He indicated Yannik, who greeted Michael demurely. "If you have any influence with her, persuade her, like a good fellow, to give me a sitting or two; just head and hands."

"Will you pose for Monsieur?" said Michael.

"Already I have said 'No.'"

"Does your grandmother object?" asked Carne.

"Grand'mère? She might object, Monsieur, but it is I," she spoke decisively, "*I*, you understand, who object."

Michael, eyeing the girl keenly, nodded. He made no attempt to weaken her resolution. Miss Machin divined—or said that she did so afterwards—that Michael was pleased at her refusal. Yannik smiled gravely, thanked everybody, and took her leave. Carne, flushed with exasperation, muttered something to Keats.

"She couldn't have resisted you a minute longer," the Satellite said. "She ran from temptation."

"What fools some of these girls are about posing!" said Carne angrily. "And most of them won't take off as much as the coif."

"I'm delighted to hear it," said Machie. "Of course, with professionals it's different,

although, personally, I prefer draped figures even when it's a question of portraying goddesses. And I can't think of these nice modest maidens of Pont-Aven without their coifs."

Carne smiled at Téphany, indicating by a slight shrug of his shoulder his amusement and polite contempt. But, to his astonishment, Téphany sided with her friend.

"I agree with Miss Machin," she said emphatically. "My father never asked a Pont-Aven girl to take off her coif, and shall I tell you why?"

"If you please," said Carne. "I shall be interested to hear Mr. Lane's reasons for such a remarkable abstention."

"He married a Bretonne, Mr. Carne. And he understood us. Speaking for my sex here, I tell you that any attempt to take from these simple girls what their natural modesty imposes would be regarded not only by me, but by every man or woman who knows anything of our race, as little short of—of sacrilege. *You*"—she turned quickly to Michael—"feel as I do?"

Michael met her glance; then he said deliberately, "Yes."

"Oh, that's all right." Carne flushed scarlet, but he recovered his self-possession almost too easily, so Téphany thought. "You see, Miss Lane, I had forgotten that you are of Breton blood. But you will allow me to add that I have known this thing, which you

regard as sacrilege, come to pass in Brittany quite easily and naturally."

"Have you made inquiries as to what happened to your models after you had finished with them?"

"I am not speaking of myself," he answered. "In the cases I recall it was a business proposition. The girls were paid, and took the money gladly enough."

"Perhaps," said Téphany. Then she added, very quietly: "In the Italian quarter, near Hatton Garden in London, there are to be found, living side by side, the plaster-cast sellers, the people who tell fortunes with birds, the organ-grinders, and the professional models. An organ-grinder won't marry a model, although the models earn more money. Even in London the *posari* are regarded as pariahs. But here, in Brittany, girls who sell their modesty strip themselves of far more than their clothes. So long as they live they will be regarded as outcasts, naked and ashamed."

"But one must have models," said Keats.

"Of course," Téphany replied with asperity; "but I have no sympathy with artists who sacrifice everything and everybody to their art. I have met men who regarded the sufferings of Christ upon the Cross as inspiring not the worship of the world but the masterpieces of the Renaissance."

Carne passed his hand across his forehead; he was feeling warm, because, although he considered that Téphany Lane was absurdly

vehement, still he was particularly anxious to win her good opinion. Accordingly he swallowed his resentment, and said amiably:

"I'm really awfully sorry we got on to this subject, Miss Lane."

At this Téphany held out her hand with a smile dimpling her cheek.

"Mary Machin will tell you that my bark is worse than my bite; isn't it, Machie?"

"How can I answer that?" Machie replied. "I have never been bitten by you, my dear; and you bark but seldom. Still"—she pursed up her lips reflectively—"I think your bite would be rather dreadful."

"I am sure I should die of it," said the Californian.

"After all, Clinton is not an Ingres," said the Satellite.

"An Ingres?" Miss Machin's fine blue eyes flickered with curiosity. "Who was Ingres?"

"He painted *La Source*," said Téphany.

"Was he very wicked?" said Machie.

Keats and Carne betrayed signs of uneasiness. In a harsh voice Michael answered Mary Machin:

"It is said that he treated abominably the beautiful child who posed for *La Source*. She died in a hospital."

Without another word, without saying "good-bye," Michael turned and walked away. Téphany, very pale, was sensible that he had spoken to her, although he had answered Mary

Machin. Carne and Keats rose and went into the café.

Machie said placidly: "My dear, you were rather too severe with poor Mr. Carne."

Téphany nodded; then she said thoughtfully: "I spoke strongly, too strongly perhaps, and yet, Machie, my feeling on this subject is ten thousand times stronger than any words could be."

"How very abrupt Mr. Ossory is! On this subject he feels as strongly as you do. When he answered me just now his hands were clenched. He spoke of that French painter as if he loathed him."

"He loathed what he did," said Téphany slowly.

CHAPTER X

CARNE

Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?

DURING the fortnight that followed the ladies saw nothing of Michael. Upon the day after Yannik brought her dolls to Pont-Aven, Téphany wrote him a short letter. She could not bring herself to climb Michael's stairs, although she knew that a minute's talk is better than an eternity of scribbling notes of explanation. Provided always that two persons understand each other. But did Michael understand her? Would any man of his character and temperament be able to sympathise with a weak woman? With profound humility, Téphany told herself that she was weak, inasmuch as she lacked the strength to look facts squarely in the face. That absurd desire to wipe out a decade still dominated her. Pont-Aven, with its myriad associations, the warm June days, the exuberant life in the woods and fields, the people with whom she talked freely, listening to their simple, primal loves—these things called aloud with clarion voice, bidding her enjoy the

passing hour. Is it putting the case too strongly to add that what drove poor Mère Pouldour to strong drink drove Téphany also to a Bacchanalian licence of the imagination? The intoxicating thrill which she experienced as she joined in the dance at Riec would have proved a merely agreeable flutter of youth and high spirits, had it not been preceded by hours of poignant suffering. Her sympathy, her capacity for pain enhanced, as it always does in reaction, her passionate desire to be happy. The stampede from shadow into sunlight was thus explained to Michael in a score of lines. He replied the same day, writing his answer in pencil upon a sheet of drawing-paper :

“ If you think that I dare to reproach any one except myself, you are mistaken. Accept all the gods give. I am going to Douarnénez for a couple of weeks. After that let us meet as soon as possible. Your kindness, your generosity, has been to me as a benediction. I am ravenous for the crumbs of your friendship.”

When Michael left Pont-Aven he seemed to take the fine weather with him : but Téphany welcomed the change from azure skies to flying wracks of clouds. Rain came down in torrents : then the strong west wind blew mightily, and the great ocean rose up in wrath to meet it. After a storm of twenty-four hours the elements patched up a truce. The wind dwindled away into a breeze ; the huge clouds were split up

into filmy transparencies of vapour ; the roar of the waves sank into an attenuated moan.

As soon as the skies partially cleared Téphany put on a stout skirt and walked to the fishing village of Ros Braz, where Mère Pouldour lived, a hamlet perched upon a high bank of the estuary, approached from Pont-Aven by a path winding over the moorland through thickets of gorse and broom and scrub-oak, with here and there a farm-house surrounded by orchards and fields of rye and oats still vividly green.

Mère Pouldour's cottage overlooked the estuary and the wooded slopes beyond which encompass the château of Poulguen, a small castel of the fourteenth century. The cottage was built of granite. Blue-green shutters gave a charming note of colour to its grey walls, and a vine clambered towards a roof of small red tiles. In the tiny garden, surrounded by a neatly-trimmed hawthorn hedge, stood a fine fig-tree ; oaks overhung the water, where the fishing-boats lay at anchor waiting for fine weather. They were big clumsy boats, painted black, with a thin blue, or yellow, or green line running below the taffrail. From their masts fluttered the pale blue sardine nets, whose heavy corks accentuated the aerial delicacy of their texture. These nets, to Téphany, indicated certain characteristics of the fishermen who used them. The men were solid and strong as their boats, with faces and hands burnt red-brown like the sails, but in

their square heads were fancies light as these gossamer webs, and as easily destroyed.

Téphany smelt the pungent odour of seaweed, the *goémon* collected by the women and used to manure the fields, and also the healthy reek of tar, as she passed through Mère Pouldour's garden, and knocked at the door. It was opened by the old woman, slightly blear-eyed and unsteady, but quite sober. She welcomed Téphany effusively, apologising for what had passed at Riec, mumbling her thanks, and breaking off into exclamations at Mademoiselle's grace and beauty and goodness of heart. Very thankfully Téphany noted that the interior of the cottage had not changed. Poverty occupied it, but poverty had not yet been driven to sell its furniture. The big *lit-clos* filled one side of the room ; the black polished surface of the oak reflected the pale shafts of light from the small window opposite. To the left was the huge fireplace, the wide hearth in front of which Pouldour and his stalwart sons had sat, night after night, year after year, throughout the winters, letting their saturated clothes dry upon their bodies. An oak table, much polished also, stood in the centre of the room, with a rude bench beneath it, no longer used now that the men were dead ; above the high mantel, in a tiny niche, was a figure in faience of the Virgin. In a corner, standing on end, was a cider barrel ; a clock ticked solemnly beside it. Everything was scrupulously clean and neat, and upon a

small table near the window Téphany's eyes caught a shimmer of silk and cambric, the raw materials of Yannik's handicraft.

"Where is Yannik?" she asked presently.

At once the grandmother broke into a torrent of quavering speech, partly French, partly Breton: "A Monsieur, a very handsome, kind gentleman, had walked from Pont-Aven upon the day of the big storm. He had arrived wet to the skin. An artist-painter, to be sure. And he had persuaded Yannik to sit to him in the shed out yonder. Not without difficulty—*Ma Doué*—for Yannik was of the most respectable, and some of the Pont-Aven girls who posed for the gentlemen were—well, Mademoiselle knew about them. But the Monsieur had entreated, and he had a way, *hein?* Finally, Yannik said—Yes, for the head and coif only. And, after all, who would be the wiser? The cottage was isolated. Yannik refused absolutely to go to Pont-Aven. And Monsieur had a heart of gold, and gold too in his purse, which was so convenient.

And so on, interminably.

Téphany listened, slightly flushed. She was sensible that this tale had annoyed her; and yet she could not blame Carne, nor the girl, nor the old woman, who, sober, adored the grandchild, standing—how frail an obstacle!—between herself and misery.

"We will go and see them," said Mère Pouldour. "I pop in and out to crack a joke with Monsieur. He is charming, Mademoiselle,

so frank, so gay, and so clever with his brush."

Téphany followed her out of the cottage, down a flagged path upon which the old woman's sabots clattered noisily, and into a shed used in years gone by as a place for drying nets and sails.

"Miss Lane!"

Carne came forward, smiling.

"You see," he said, indicating Yannik, who was blushing, "I gained my point, after all; not without difficulty, I can assure you."

"Fat five-franc pieces," said Téphany.

"Yes—backsheesh," he laughed. "And why not?"

"May I look at your canvas?"

"Oh, certainly, but—" His expressive face clouded. Then he grumbled: "I never found a more fascinating study, but I've bungled everything shockingly. I am ashamed, positively, that you should see the extent of my failure."

Téphany spoke first to Yannik, who answered in monosyllables, with an air of conscious guilt, at once piteous and yet comical to behold.

"If I could only catch that," said Carne, indicating her pouting, timid, alluring bashfulness. "The little witch thinks she's committing a deadly sin."

Téphany nodded, smiled encouragingly at Yannik, and then turned to the easel.

"But it promises well," she said. "It's very odd, you know, but—"

"Yes, Miss Lane?"

"You go to work as Michael Ossory does."

"You couldn't pay me a higher compliment. But when have you seen him at work on the figure? Oh, of course, long ago. And why he gave it up heaven only knows!" He broke off abruptly, intent upon his own work. Here, again, he revealed the curious likeness to the elder man which had struck Téphany from the first. He continued, interjectionally, as Michael used to talk when he was acutely interested: "Now, that is not bad, is it? But the passage just below—oh, horrible! And already I've scraped it out a dozen times. If you look closely—Yannik, hold your chin a bit higher—no, no, NO!" He rushed at her, took her chin delicately between the tips of his fingers, and adjusted the pose. Yannik blushed at his touch, but did not resent it. Carne was staring at Téphany. "You see, there's a shadow quite clearly defined, with sharpest edges. That must be put in with one firm stroke of the brush. It's maddening." He seized the palette, concentrated, as it were, all his powers of mind and hand upon the stroke, and laid it on the wet canvas.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Téphany.

"I believe I've got it. You inspired me. Well, I shan't paint any more to-day. Perhaps you will allow me to walk back with you? Yes? That will be delightful. Work's over, Yannik."

She came forward shyly, and gazed at the

canvas. Mère Pouldour broke out into rather maudlin praise, which Carne cut short.

"May I wash Monsieur's brushes?" asked Yannik.

"My child"—his manner was fatherly—"you have never washed brushes."

"I saw Monsieur do it yesterday. It seemed easy. Let me try."

"It is very amiable of you."

She took the brushes and moved slowly away.

"To-morrow at nine-thirty sharp," Carne called after her.

"At nine-thirty, Monsieur."

For some minutes Téphany and Carne walked side by side without speaking, then the man said abruptly: "You will do Yannik a kindness and me a favour if you will not mention that she poses. I have told Johnnie, but the other fellows need not know. Naturally, you will mention the matter to Miss Machin, who is discreet."

"Is she? Well, I shall not mention it, even to her."

"Are you angry with me, Miss Lane? I should be so sorry to incur your displeasure."

"Angry? No. After all, it is additional grist for that poor little mill."

"I shall make several studies," said Carne, warming again into enthusiasm. "The expression on her face is what I have been hunting for a year past, and, of course, I want to keep her to myself. But it's principally on

Yannik's account that secrecy is expedient. It seems she has a lover, the man who is in charge of Ossory's boat."

"A lover who objects to posing?"

"He might object if he knew."

"You have not persuaded her to keep it from him?"

"No," he replied stiffly. "You appear to think me rather a cad, Miss Lane."

"I beg your pardon, most sincerely," said Téphany. "Did she, little Yannik, speak of her lover?"

Carne proceeded to explain at length that he had obtained the information first from the grandmother, and afterwards from Yannik herself. The lover was Léon Bourhis. Fisher-folk, in Brittany, marry without dowries, confident that the great Mother will provide for them, or destroy. Except in the case of a fish famine, the Mother does provide, sometimes very generously. Léon Bourhis, it seemed, had just returned from his five years' service in the navy. Next year he hoped to be able to buy a share in a sardine boat; then he would marry Yannik. Carne added that he had met Bourhis, a fine fellow.

"I shall make him like me," said the Californian; "and when he realises that I have proved a friend to Yannik and the old woman, and put some five-franc pieces into Yannik's stocking, he will laugh at the posing."

"That is not certain," said Téphany. Then, very gravely, she concluded: "It is none of

my business, Mr. Carne, but I advise you to speak to this man, Bourhis, yourself. You have great persuasive powers, and you know how to use them."

"Thank you," Carne replied warmly; but he didn't say that he would act upon her advice.

Téphany began to talk of subjects other than models; Carne joined in, eager to leave thin ice as soon as possible. Insensibly, the lines upon Téphany's face relaxed as she came under the spell of Carne's pleasing voice and manners. From his name she had guessed that he had Celtic blood in his veins: a fact which subtly attracted her to him before they had exchanged half a dozen words on the first day they met. Now, becoming very confidential, he spoke of his parents, of his upbringing in that wonderful California, of his first meeting with his mistress, Art, of her ever-tightening grasp, and of the final wrenching asunder of the chains which had held him bond to the Almighty Dollar. Téphany learned that his grandfather, the founder of the family fortunes, had come out of the West of Ireland. This man, one of the pioneers, had worked his passage round the Horn in the forties. He had married, just before the discovery of gold, the daughter and heiress of a Spanish-Californian ranchero, lord of many flocks and herds, a patriarch living upon an immense domain. Carne described graphically the change in California, from the lotus-eating, pastoral life to the stupendous activities which

the discovery of immense quantities of gold set in perpetual motion. His grandfather, evidently a man of sagacity and foresight, had resisted the voice of the siren calling the pioneers to abandon everything in the mad quest of the precious metal. He had been content to sell his fat beeves to the miners—beeves which, till that time, had been slaughtered for their hides and tallow; he acquired more land, he became a merchant, a banker, never a miner. And he died a millionaire, dividing his millions among half a dozen sons. Of these sons, Téphany inferred that Clinton Carne's father had shown the greatest executive ability. The son, however, spoke of his sire with respect rather than love—as a colossal force in a new country, bending all things and all persons to his will. Téphany divined what was left unsaid: the possible unscrupulous exercise of power, the undivided energies given to the accumulation of wealth, the indifference to everything which lay without the circle in which the autocrat reigned supreme.

"When you went round the world," said Carne, "surely you passed through San Francisco?"

"Yes," said Téphany. She remembered, now, hearing the name of Carne; the Carne mansion on Nob Hill had been pointed out to her. She spoke of it to the young man, adding wonderingly: "So you sacrificed that for this?"

"Come, come, Miss Lane; you don't regard it as a sacrifice?"

"Perhaps not; but your father—— Well, you did not slip easily through his fingers?"

Carne laughed gaily.

"Fortunately, I have a mother," he said.

At the word, Téphany's heart warmed to him.

"Tell me about her, Mr. Carne."

"She's the sweetest and best mother in the world."

The mother, it seemed, belonged to one of the great Southern families ruined by the Civil War. From the mother Carne had inherited his love of culture, of colour and form, of beauty, wherever found. The mother had snatched this, her youngest born, from the Moloch of business; she had persuaded the father to let him study in Paris; she had soaped the ways with infinite tact; she had even made her grim husband admit that in the development of a new country the claims of Art could not be ignored, and that Art claimed the best. Finally, the father had given a reluctant consent.

"But when I made my first trip to Paris he said a word."

"One can guess what it was."

"Yes. He is the sort of man, Miss Lane, who holds failure to be the unpardonable sin. When I bade him good-bye he looked me up and down, very slowly. As a kid, that look gave me cold chills down the spine. 'Clinton,' he said, 'your mother and you together have bested me, and I don't like to be bested.'

I shan't forgive you till you've proved that you're right and I'm wrong."

"And now, after your success last year and this?"

Carne shrugged his shoulders.

"Old Blumenthal got my Nymph too cheap. And my father measures success, and rewards success, by what it fetches in dollars. Apart from my allowance, which is a good one, he told me that he'd double every cent I earned. Well," the young man laughed, "he hasn't been much out of pocket by that deal so far. And whenever he writes to me he takes pains to tell me what my brothers have done—confound them! Now—do you blame me for being so keen?"

"No," said Téphany; "but"—she paused and finished her sentence with a slight emphasis—"I blame your father."

The remaining days preceding Michael's return to Pont-Aven passed without incident. Téphany and Machie sketched in the morning, either out of doors or in the studio, and in the afternoon made expeditions to the neighbouring villages and small towns. The weather remained uncertain, thereby proving a source of annoyance and of conversation to Mary Machin. Téphany, as truly Bretonne in this as in higher matters, accepted rain or sunshine philosophically. She preferred soft grey skies to blue, and contended that the fragrance of earth after a heavy shower was compensation

in full for muddy boots and petticoats. Daughter of the wild moor, she drew nourishment from it where an alien might have starved. The mists drifting across the bleak pastures saturated her mind, softening much that the strenuous years had made hard, percolating into tiny crevices, finding there seeds of the past and quickening them into life and beauty. When the clouds impended, blotting out all colour and sparkle, she thought of the resplendent, omnipotent sun behind them. When its golden beams pierced the darkness her soul leaped to meet them, in wonder at the glory of them. Sensible as she had ever been of the variety and symbolism of nature's moods, their true meaning seemed to have escaped her till now, when she interpreted them not for herself, as heretofore, but for Michael, and for the suffering, the sin, the crime—she confronted the dreadful word valiantly—of which Michael stood the self-confessed epitome.

One afternoon, after a second visit to Mère Pouldour, Téphany, passing the small château of Ros Braz, saw a notice on the gate, advertising the place as being "to let" for the summer season. The château was surrounded by a shady, old-fashioned garden. After much talk with Mary Machin, and bearing in mind that Yvonne's hotel would soon be uncomfortably full of Philistines, Téphany decided to take it for six months. The rent was absurdly small, the house comfortably furnished, and in

the salon stood an excellent piano. Téphany had been forbidden to sing at all for six weeks. Then Sir Japhet had recommended a cautious trial of the vocal chords. As he had said, in his clear, trenchant, impossible-to-be-mistaken tones, the lesion would either yield to rest and treatment, or it would produce chronic induration. Already Téphany felt joyously assured that her throat was stronger: she could swallow food without any feeling of discomfort; she could talk at length without that burning sensation just below the tonsils. But Sir Japhet had insisted upon one point. Under the most favourable conditions she must not dare to accept public engagements for several months. It will be remembered that the great man had named six, but he had hinted at twelve. And it was he also who suggested the selection of a locality which—as he phrased it—previous experience had demonstrated to be the most likely to fortify his patient's general health.

Yvonne offered to provide a cook and a couple of maids.

These things were duly laid before the approving Machie; but Téphany withheld another reason which urged her to take a house rather isolated and inconveniently distant from butcher and baker. Michael refused to break bread beneath Yvonne's roof, nor would he pass her threshold. But Téphany felt assured that he would come, not often, perhaps, but always gladly, to Ros Braz.

CHAPTER XI

FURIC

In nature there are no rewards or punishments ; there are consequences.

THE installation at Ros Braz occupied fully the attention of Téphany and Mary Machin during the following week. Upon the evening of the day when the ladies moved in from Pont-Aven, Michael returned. He looked the better for his visit to Douarnénez.

“But I wish he would shave off that horrid beard,” said Machie.

The words echoed a similar wish in Téphany’s heart, and when Michael called at Ros Braz, she said, “Will you do me a favour ?”

“Gladly, gladly.”

“Don’t be rash !”

In his old boyish manner, he exclaimed : “I am so grateful to you, Téphany.” He glanced round the garden, in which they happened to be standing, to make sure that they were alone ; then he added gravely : “I would cut off a hand to serve you.”

“I believe you would,” she answered, the

colour coming into her cheeks. "All the same, it is not so certain that you will cut off your beard."

"My beard?" He regarded her ruefully.

"Yes. And your hair; and—and"—she plunged headlong—"and smarten yourself up."

"Smarten myself up? What odd creatures women are!"

"If it be odd to wish to see their friends at their best, women are odd. If I appeared on this lawn in"—she eyed him critically—"in a shockingly shabby and soiled dress, with my hair falling over my face, and in positively disgraceful shoes, would it not annoy you?"

"Perhaps," he growled, frowning. "But, after shipwreck—"

Téphany touched his arm gently.

"I know that, Michael, but—to—please—me."

"All right." He turned on his heel.

This instant acquiescence, this flattering desire to obey what he regarded as a whim, stirred Téphany profoundly.

"Michael!"

"Yes."

She approached him shyly. If her words were the words of a mature woman, her looks were those of a girl.

"I can guess," she murmured, "what you are thinking, and you are wrong. When you deliberately"—she confronted his eyes bravely—"set about changing the old Michael, you

thought, perhaps, that a different face staring at you whenever you looked in the glass——”

“Looked in the glass,” he repeated. Téphany smiled.

“Obviously you have not looked in the glass,” she amended. “Let me begin again. When everything connected with the old Michael became hateful——”

“Yes, yes.”

“You changed him outwardly——”

“As he was changed inwardly.”

She shrugged her shoulders in delicate protest.

“Still, you remain Michael Ossory, and what you have done, good or evil, is part of you—and imperishable.”

“That is tremendously true,” he answered.

“Because it is true, is it not madness to rebel? You have shrunk from yourself, Michael?”

“Yes.”

“And you have tried to turn yourself into another man, a hermit, *you*? You have thought—if I hurt you, forgive me—that because you have sinned you must put on sackcloth and carry a face of mourning. You have rushed out of the sight of God and man. Let me finish! I have not your brains, but even my intelligence tells me that you are illogical. You are you; and if you have mutilated yourself in the past, is that a reason to mutilate yourself in the present? Has suffering—I know how deeply

you have suffered—taught you that? I don't ask you to try to become more like the old Michael out of mere whim."

"If it were possible—"

"It is possible."

They were silent, Téphany wondering whether she had penetrated the crust; Ossory, on his side, turning over her words, weighing them, resolving them—using the verb in its chemical sense—into their elements. Was Téphany right in believing that sin might form accretions upon the soul comparable indeed to such excrescences and rugosities as appear upon a neglected body? For the first time, since sin and its consequences had overpowered his finer sensibilities, he began to see, very dimly, that all sin, all suffering, whether great or small, must be subject to a divine statute of limitations. Man alone, not God, dares to pronounce his brother man hopelessly bankrupt. Michael drew a deep breath.

"You mean this," he said slowly: "ten years ago I lost, let us say, the sight of one eye, and ever since I have refused to see with the other?"

"I mean just that."

"Téphany, you have been, you are, a true friend to me."

Next day he presented himself at Ros Braz, shaved. He looked so like the old Michael that Téphany had some difficulty in suppressing a cry of astonishment. His face was singularly well-balanced, strong yet refined, with features

delightfully irregular, but not, as is so often the case, exasperatingly contradictory. It was a real pleasure to see once more such a firm yet delicately-modelled chin. And the clean-shaven skin had that fineness of texture and clearness which only youth or a renouncing of the flesh-pots will give. Michael lived upon the plainest food, and in the open air. With the change in his appearance was a change, too, in manner. Once he laughed with an echo of the whole-souled mirth of other days. Téphany laughed with him, but the tears were near her eyes, because, in spite of the change, those other days seemed so remote.

He came often to Ros Braz, because his boat was there, and he spent long hours upon the sea ; but he seldom passed through the château gates. When he did call upon the ladies he always seemed loath to leave them. Téphany noticed, too, that he talked more to Mary Machin than to herself. This, however, was not surprising, for Machie's sympathy, her kindness, her belief in the goodness of others, her sensibility, were always, so to speak, on tap. Téphany, on the other hand, had moods when the prattle of Johnnie Keats bored her ; when Carne, with his western vitality and energy, exasperated her ; when the talk, invariably ending and generally beginning with success in Art, seemed hopelessly banal and tiresome. Michael never took part in these disquisitions, but he listened attentively enough to Carne, with the half-mocking smile

which provoked the Californian to reassert his theories with greater emphasis and in a louder voice. One day Carne said angrily to Téphany: "Ossory has failed, and therefore he thinks that success is not worth having."

Whereupon Téphany replied drily: "I don't think you look much below the surface, Mr. Carne."

"Perhaps it is as well that I don't," he retorted. "Unpleasant things underlie failure sometimes."

She divined that he was jealous of her friendship for Michael, and made allowances for him. At times, he attracted her in a way that troubled her peace of mind. His love-making was charming: what all love-making should be in its first stages. He brought her flowers and books, he was able to anticipate her whims, he planned pleasant excursions. Machie was never tired of singing his praises. Had he not persuaded Mère Pouldour to give up strong drink? Was he not a devoted son, writing long letters to his mother regularly once a week? Had he not ideals, culture, refinement rare indeed with most young men, and with these excellent qualities the strength to protect, the tenderness to cherish, an unprotected woman, alone in the world?

It would be absurd to deny that Machie's words produced an effect. Téphany's breakdown had given her pause; it conducted her to an accounting, to the striking of a balance. If she lost her voice, what would become of

her? She had saved, it is true, a couple of thousand pounds; she had her small income; she could attain reputation as a teacher of singing. But the woman in her turned in dismay from a future to be lived alone, barren of triumph, of excitement, in some placid backwater of life. And if she regained her voice, what then? Her perception, her power of self-analysis, told her that the greatest triumphs of her profession would not suffice without other things. When money first came to her, she had thought a thousand times how sweet it would be to share it with Michael: the Michael who was too proud to approach her: the Michael to whom she must go: the Michael whose failure should be redeemed and glorified by her love.

But the old Michael had loved somebody else, and the new did not want her, save as a friend. He was even willing that she should marry another. The consciousness of this bit deep into her mind.

To make certain of Michael's indifference, she feigned a greater interest in Carne than she felt. Machie accused her of flirting.

"And the young man needs no encouragement," said Machie, very severely. "He wears his heart upon his sleeve, poor fellow! You ought to take him, Téphany, or send him about his business."

"His love-making does not interfere with his business," Téphany replied.

This was true. Every morning and all the

morning was spent by Carne at Ros Braz. He showed Téphany his studies of Yannik's head, and said that they were the best work he had ever done, and that Téphany had inspired him to the effort of his life. He added that he had acted upon her advice in regard to the taking of Léon Bourhis into his confidence. Fisherman and painter were upon the best of terms ; Bourhis was willing enough that Yannik should pose for so amiable, so *gentil* a *monsieur*. Here again Téphany realised, with a curious misgiving, Carne's power of imposing his will upon others, and winning their affection against odds. Bourhis was a fair type of the Breton fisherman—simple, loyal, honest, yet capable of fiercest passion and jealousy. Téphany wondered how the prejudice of such a one had been overcome. Bourhis himself enlightened her.

"Monsieur has been goodness itself," he told Téphany. "He came to me like a comrade. '*Mon brave*,' he said, 'you want to marry the best and prettiest maid in Finistère. I know all about it, and I wish you luck. When is the marriage ? I must assist, mark you.' That is how he spoke to me, Mademoiselle, with a smile and a shake of the hand. And then I said that we must be patient, and he laughed—a laugh that warmed the heart, look you. And then he offered to help. He said that he wanted to paint Yannik's head, and that the old woman was willing. And it seems, Mademoiselle, that Monsieur is in love

himself—oh! he is not cold, that one!—yes, passionately in love with a demoiselle; but he won't ask her to marry him till he has painted a great picture—and if Yannik can help him to paint it, and if he can pay the money which will hasten our marriage—why not—why not?"

"Why not?" repeated Téphany, blushing. Then, feeling her blood warm with resentment against Carne's reference to herself, she said, with an acerbity wasted upon Bourhis:

"It is strange that Monsieur Carne should have told you his secret."

"Secret, Mademoiselle? It is no secret, or I should not have spoken to you about it. Monsieur is not ashamed of being in love; he is proud of it. It is like that with men. Everybody knew that I adored Yannik long before I told her so. The maids hide their hearts, Mademoiselle, not the men."

After this, Téphany was kinder to Carne, because she was conscious that she had not been quite fair to him.

About a week later Carne told her, with an accent of triumph, that he had persuaded Yannik to take off her coif. She had masses of the loveliest hair a-gleam with indescribable tints, which Carne transferred to his canvas with enthusiasm. When Téphany said to Mère Pouldour, "How did Monsieur persuade Yannik?" the grandmother answered chuckling, "Léon and I persuaded Yannik, Mademoiselle; and Monsieur has a tongue like running water."

Téphany nodded, saying nothing. Yannik blushed when she saw her, and looked down somewhat shamefacedly. Téphany eyed her keenly, making no protest, yet sensible that the girl was in troubled waters. As she was turning away Yannik cast an appealing glance at her: a fluttering, helpless look which loosened Téphany's tongue.

"What is it?" she asked gently.

"Oh, Mademoiselle, you are angry with me for taking off my coif, but indeed I could not help it."

"It is not easy to say 'No.'"

"But why should I say 'No,' Mademoiselle? If he paints my face, why shouldn't he paint my neck and hair?"

"You have taken off your collar, too, then?"

At once Yannik assumed a slightly defiant expression.

"Grand'mère insisted, to oblige Monsieur."

"Well, Yannik, you will be married the sooner."

Again the expression in the pretty face changed. Defiance melted into perplexity. She shrugged her finely modelled shoulders.

"Monsieur Carne has been very generous," said Téphany.

"Oh, yes. But——" Yannik hesitated, then with passion she continued: "He gives the big pieces to grand'mère, and she spends them——"

"Not on drink?"

"On masses for the souls of my father and uncles."

"Oh!"

Dismay provoked the exclamation.

"Léon would be angry if he knew," added Yannik; but immediately afterwards she said with resignation: "And yet, if—if they died unshriven after mortal sin, perhaps, grand'mère is right, and I *am* selfish to think of myself."

"I will speak to your grandmother, Yannik."

"Mademoiselle, she will be so angry because I have told you. You won't tell her or Léon? Promise me."

Téphany promised, not without reluctance. The case presented extraordinary interest, because, in spite of her education, of her experience of the world, she could look at this sacrifice of Yannik's little dowry from the point of view of the grandmother to whom the souls of her sons who had perished at sea clamoured unceasingly for such help as money alone could secure. She saw, with distinctness, the old woman sitting at the door of her cottage, her fingers busy with her knitting, but her bleared eyes gazing across the smooth waters of the estuary at the terrible ocean out yonder. And the mist in those dim eyes was to Téphany as the mist between sea and sky, or as the mists between the here and the hereafter: impenetrable shadows behind which might shine most radiant light. . . .

Those who have the sympathy necessary to

apprehend Téphany's veneration for the faith which sustains Breton peasant and fisherman against outrageous fortune will appreciate the distress and perplexity aroused in her by this robbery of the living to pay for masses for the dead. "Let the living work in anguish, provided that the dead repose in peace." To attempt to controvert such a belief would be hopeless. Could the voice of any living person thrill like the chorus of the unburied dead? In the sob of the sea, in the wail of the wind, in the bay of a hound, in the dreary note of the curlew, Mère Pouldour heard and recognised the agonised invocation of her strong sons.

Naturally enough, Téphany dreaded to enlist Michael's sympathies. To speak to Mary Machin was to invite indignation, but nothing more potent than words; to appeal to Carne meant an indirect violation of her promise to Yannik. The young man, in his masterful way, would probably keep the money back in trust for the future Madame Léon Bourhis. The grandmother would vent fanatical rage on Yannik. Michael, however, might be induced to lay the matter before Père Narcisse, who, albeit not Mère Pouldour's spiritual adviser, would doubtless strain a point to oblige Michael and to right a wrong.

Nevertheless, Téphany was sensible of an increasing reluctance to speak to Michael on this subject. In the light of subsequent knowledge, this unreasonable shrinking on her part

to do a natural action possessed significance ; but finally, after some procrastination, she walked to Pont-Aven and into Michael's studio.

Michael was painting, and when Téphany came in he nodded, but went on with his work. A new model was posing, one of remarkable appearance : a type of the Breton rapidly becoming extinct, an amalgam of the Iberian and Celtic races oftener found in Morbihan than Finistère. The man had long black hair and a beard, both streaked with white. Out of his sallow face shone a pair of dark-blue eyes, overshadowed by thick black brows. His features were massive.

"This is Furic," said Michael.

The model glanced at Téphany without moving his head. Téphany spoke a few words in Breton, a kindly greeting. Immediately the Breton's harsh features softened, as he replied in the same tongue.

"You are not of Finistère," said Téphany.

"No, Mademoiselle."

"He came up from Belle-Isle in one of the tunny boats," said Michael. "Make him talk, if you can. He won't talk to me."

Téphany asked a question in regard to his calling. The man answered with a monosyllable ; then, he thawed into speech. He had served in the navy, and he seemed to know every inch of the northern and western coast of Brittany. Téphany became more interested in his talk than his face. Each

word indicated a survivor of the old race of passionately superstitious fishermen, who interpret everything connected with the sea according to an inexorable code of traditions handed down, orally, from prehistoric times.

"You must have seen some terrible storms?" Téphany murmured.

"Ah, yes, Mademoiselle; but I was never frightened."

"Really?"

"You see, I know I shall not be drowned."

"You say—*you know?*"

"Certainly. At the moment I was born the moon was shining in a cloudless sky; it was high tide, also."

"Therefore you cannot be drowned?"

An ironical inflection informed Michael's voice. The man frowned.

"I have been wrecked," he said defiantly, "wrecked three times. Once all the crew perished; I alone was left."

Téphany nodded, thinking of Corentin, who was saved when her father and the rest of the crew were wrecked on the Concarneau reefs.

"And once," continued Furic, addressing Téphany in sombre accents, "once, Mademoiselle, I was sitting with my old *patron*, in his house. We were drinking cider; making the most of the few hours before we sailed for Iceland. It was the 19th of February, Mademoiselle. Suddenly we heard a noise outside; a seagull was beating its wings against the pane of the window. Lantec said,

'Is that a sign for me or for thee?' I said,
'It is not for me, *mon vieux*'; nor was it.
Well, our boat was cut down by a steamer
upon a foggy night in April, and Lantec was
drowned with half his crew. His body, of
course, was never recovered, and his spirit
returned to Paimpol. His sister has heard it
calling, '*Iou—Iou—Iou!*'"

"You believe that?"

"Why, of course. It is the voice of Bugul
Noz, the shepherd of the night. I, myself—"
He paused and a curious expression of terror
flickered across his weather-beaten face.

"Yes?"

"Nothing, Mademoiselle. Of course, I am
a poor ignorant fisherman."

Now he looked simply sly and obstinate.
Michael said abruptly:

"Paimpol? What took you, a Belle-Isle
fisherman, to Paimpol and the cod-fishing?"

The man shrugged his broad shoulders.

"I had my reason," he answered moodily.
"For the rest one must earn one's bread
where one can. The tunny-fishing is a poor
business at times."

Shortly afterwards, Furic was dismissed.
As Michael cleaned his palette, he said to
Téphany: "I must tell you how I got that
model. I met him only yesterday. He came
and offered himself as a model this morning."

"How very odd!" said Téphany.

"That is not all. Last night he got very
drunk. And drunk, I can picture him as an

unpleasant customer. At any rate, his *patron* and he fell out and came to blows. He offered to pose because he's out of a job."

"He looks very wild," said Téphany.

"That, of course, is the reason why I engaged him. I shall make several studies of his head. If you want to draw him, you are welcome; he'll be at the studio from nine to twelve each day."

"I came here to talk about something else," said Téphany.

"You are not in trouble?" Michael asked quickly.

"I? No."

Then, without preliminaries, she plunged into a statement of the facts. Looking at Michael she saw that his usually impassive face seemed to be much moved; he frowned heavily, and moved his hands with unmistakable irritation. At the end he said sharply:

"It's abominable."

"If you spoke to Père Narcisse——"

"But I'm not thinking of the old woman. Let Carne find another model."

"But, Michael, he is so set on this one. He raves about her, just—well, just as you used to do."

"Père Narcisse would not interfere. I doubt if he knows the old woman; and he is a Breton; if you think the dead do not call to him——"

He shut his lips resolutely. When he

opened them he added, in a different tone of voice : "Perhaps I shall be able to say a word to Carne, although you——"

"Yes?"

He smiled nervously, with a humorous twist of the lips.

"I was about to add that a woman such as you are, Téphany, would touch levers out of my reach."

Téphany's cheeks were unduly warm, as she answered quickly : "I shall not speak to Mr. Carne; I don't believe it would be any use."

"But to please you—surely——"

"To please me?" She echoed his words disdainfully. "You advise me to put myself under obligations to a stranger, a foreigner——"

"Come, come—a stranger and foreigner?"

"You know perfectly well what I mean. His ways, his ideas, his beliefs are strange and foreign to me."

She spoke with such heat that the man watching her might well be excused for interpreting her agitation as confirmation of the speaker's interest in this stranger and foreigner.

"Look here, Téphany, leave this matter in my hands. I'll think it over, and do what I can. I am not sanguine of doing anything."

Téphany took her leave, angry with Michael, angry with herself, and angry with Carne, the original cause of the mischief. It was too late to return to breakfast at Ros Braz, so she joined the big crowd in Yvonne's dining-room, finding an empty chair next to Johnnie Keats, the one

usually occupied by Carne. Keats welcomed her warmly, inquiring after Mary Machin with much solicitude. It was generally his part to talk with Mary and to criticise her water-colour drawings. He had quite made up his mind that Carne would marry Téphany, and had settled, not without anxious thought, what sort of a wedding present to give. After breakfast, while they were drinking coffee in the garden at the back of the annexe, Keats began to speak, as usual, about his friend's work.

"He's struck a bonanza, has Clinton. Well, he admits now that I know a good thing when I see it. I said from the first that little Yannik was a peach."

Téphany held her tongue, wondering whether it might be expedient to take the Satellite into her confidence.

"Of course, he's shown you his latest study of her?"

"Yes."

"Isn't it great?"

"I was sorry Yannik had taken off her coif and her collar."

"Clinton generally gets there in the end," said Johnnie. "It's extraordinary what a little way he has with him—and he is such excellent company. I don't know what I shall do without him. We've been chums since college days."

"Why should you do without him?" Téphany demanded. She tried to keep asperity out of her tones, and failed. This assumption

upon the part of everybody that Carne had but to drop his handkerchief, to whistle one bar, and that she must flutter to him, was becoming exasperating.

"Oh, I suppose he'll be settling down one of these days, Miss Lane."

"Settling? I always imagine Mr. Carne on the move."

"Of course he'll go on and on till he gets to the very top of the tree. Why, I don't mind telling you that for the last three years I've kept his letters because they'll be wanted some day."

"Are you going to write his biography, Mr. Boswell?"

"I shall contribute letters and reminiscences," he replied imperturbably.

"I don't like to see you grovelling at Mr. Carne's feet."

"I do grovel—that is the word—in the presence of genius."

"Nothing has ever shaken your faith in your hero?"

She was conscious, as she put the question, that Johnnie regarded her keenly. But he replied seriously: "Nothing."

Téphany laughed, not ironically. Faith in anything quickened her interest and enthusiasm. None the less some imp prompted her to murmur: "You are very loyal, but if—just for the sake of argument—if he did something quite unexpected, something shameful——"

Keats nodded. Being a true son of the

West, his humour rather liked to disport itself upon the grotesque and impossible.

"Even if he took to cannibalism, Miss Lane, I should stand by him."

"You would furnish the principal joint. For that matter there are moral cannibals, who do devour their nearest and dearest. Yes, you would let yourself be gobbled up."

"Under certain circumstances, it might be better to be gobbled up than to live on. Your moral cannibal, I suppose, puts his victims out of their pain when he swallows them."

Very placidly, he lit a cigarette, and smiled at her through the circling clouds of smoke.

At that moment Yvonne came into the garden to say a word to Téphany.

"I have only just heard that you were here," she said, smiling maternally. "A compatriot of yours, a big man, well known, very distinguished, came last night. He asked for you."

"And his name?" said Téphany.

"Bah! Those English names——"

"Sir Japhet Smyth," Keats said quietly, "the doctor."

"Oh!" Téphany exclaimed. "Sir Japhet Smyth? Here?"

Yvonne nodded: "In the salon, waiting to speak to you, when you are disengaged."

Téphany rose at once, wondering what had brought the famous specialist to Pont-Aven. Within a minute the great man was telling her.

"I am taking my holiday slightly earlier this year," he said, "and spending it in Brittany. I remembered that you were at Pont-Aven. How is the throat? Better?"

Téphany was touched by this solicitude, although she was quite unable to determine whether Sir Japhet's interest was entirely professional or not. In any case, it was most kind of him to have remembered. Out of his consulting-room, he looked less formidable. She answered his questions.

"Um!"

"And your verdict, Sir Japhet——?"

"I shall call at Ros Braz, and make an examination, if you will permit me. After that, I may be able to form an opinion. We shall see. You look well. Your native air agrees with you. Yours is a very remarkable case, you know. It has been on my mind."

So the interest was professional, after all.

"I prescribed quiet," continued Sir Japhet, stroking his chin, "because excitement, physical and mental, was the cause of the mischief. Singers ought always to be phlegmatic persons, and the successful ones generally are so. When may I call upon you?"

"To-morrow morning, if you will be so kind."

Upon the morrow, he arrived with his dismal little black bag full of shining instruments. The examination lasted some time, and was very disagreeable, and not painless. At the end of it, Sir Japhet allowed himself a reassuring smile.

"I think we shall do well," he said to Machie, who was present, "but public conveyances ought to be stoutly built. This throat will never carry Wagner, for instance." Pleased that he had sustained his simile, he added smiling: "A jinriksha throat, my dear Miss Machin, not an omnibus."

"But you do think she will be able to return to the stage?"

"If this marked improvement continues, certainly; but we must be careful, very careful."

"When may I sing?" Téphany demanded.

"I have made your throat rather sore, eh? Let time allay the slight irritation. Within a few days, you may try some simple ballads. I intend to make Pont-Aven my head-quarters, more or less, for the next fortnight, so I shall have an opportunity of seeing you again. Before I go back you can begin slight but regular practising. I hope to hear you in *La Bohème* next season."

"She has been so plucky and patient," said the enthusiastic Machie, "I'm sure she deserves a reward."

"Um!" said the great man. "I am rather fond of quoting a maxim no doubt familiar to you: 'In nature there are no rewards or punishments; there are consequences.'"

CHAPTER XII

LA COTRILLADE

Être avec ceux qu'on aime ;
Cela suffit.

“FINE weather, Mademoiselle !”

Léon Bourhis indicated with a gesture the calm waters of the estuary and the soft skies above—skies of a superlative beauty of form and colour radiant with aërial masses of filmy cloud. Much rain had fallen during the night, but such of the clouds as had not yet discharged their burden of moisture were moving majestically away in a southerly direction. Above the lemon-coloured strip of sky which divided them from the sea they displayed their imperial purple with edges sparklingly white against the rain-washed blue beyond. To the north and north-west an opaline haze obscured the horizon. From this herald of heat, the filmy vapours above seemed to be retiring, not in rout, but in excellent marching order, like well-disciplined cavalry, masking the retreat of the heavy battalions. The part of the estuary protected by high banks from the breeze was unruffled. The surface presented

the appearance of an exquisitely polished silver mirror reflecting the trees of Poulguen inshore and the forms of cloud above.

Téphany had accepted an invitation from Michael to visit the sardine fleet, now fishing off Port Manech. Machie, always a wretched sailor, refused to accompany her friend. They set sail early. Téphany had not been alone with Michael since that day—more than a week ago—when she had lost her temper because he seemed so indifferent to the fact that Mère Pouldour was robbing Yannik. Afterwards, she told herself that Michael was not really indifferent, that he would interfere somehow, that she had not appealed in vain. For the moment, the situation at the cottage remained the same; or, if altered, the change was for the worse. Yannik looked pale and miserable; she avoided Téphany; she was not seen upon the small quay chattering with Léon.

Michael took the tiller, while Léon and the boy busied themselves with the big brown sails. Téphany sat down beside Michael. Very abruptly he said:

“I did what you asked. I spoke to Père Narcisse. He admits, which is a good deal from him, that Yannik has been scurvily treated; but, as I supposed, he can’t interfere. I am sorry I was not more successful.”

“Thank you very much,” said Téphany, looking up gratefully.

Michael, however, did not meet her eyes. He was staring at the distant horizon, at the

fleet of boats dimly to be discerned in the offing. Léon stood up in the bows staring also in the same direction. Téphany, glancing from one man to the other, was struck by a curious similarity, not of form or feature, but of expression. These were men of the open air, sons of the wind and sea, strong and vigorous as the element they both loved. And wind and sea, sun and rain, had placed upon each her unmistakable brand.

"You like this, Michael?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered.

As they descended the river the character of the scenery began to change, as the sea asserted her dominion over the land. Téphany could feel its pulse—the throb of the tide on the turn.

They passed a châlet, built upon a point of rocks in the centre of a small pine wood between Port Manech and the ocean. The châlet overlooked the mouth of the river, and just below the wood Nature, as if anxious to exhibit her sense of contrast, had hollowed out of huge masses of rock a delightful cove. Here, the green grass of a meadow, oaks, and bracken, met a broad riband of the finest white sand, skirting a tiny bay as clear and as blue as that of Avalon in California. Michael stared at the châlet. Téphany followed his glance.

"Fairyland!" she exclaimed impulsively.

"Yes," said Michael; then in a low voice he added: "This is the cove where I painted

that study—the one with the splintered masts and the dead sailor."

Téphany turned aside her eyes. To change the subject, she said :

" And how is that terrifying model of yours ? "

" Oh, Furic ? " Immediately his tone lightened. He began to speak like the old Michael. " Well, the confounded fellow left me to-day. He has gone off on some mysterious pilgrimage. By the way, I have heard a good deal more about Bugul Noz, and I'm making a study illustrating the Breton pursued by some such phantom. You must see it, Téphany."

" I should like to see it. Will you exhibit it, Michael ? "

At once the fire and sparkle faded from his eyes and face.

" Certainly not," he said abruptly.

Leaving the estuary, they passed the bristling rocks of Port Manech. To the right, stretching north, lay the grim coast of Finistère, the granite rocks upon which many a stout craft has been splintered. Upon this July day the summer seas seemed to be caressing them with a soft sibilant purr of satisfaction. Léon Bourhis pointed out the Glénans Islands—rose-coloured shadows melting in the haze of the horizon—where Yannik's father and uncles had lost their lives, and then spoke sombrely of the Pointe du Raz and the Baie des Trépassés. The boy, squatting at the foot of the mainmast, fixed his dark eyes upon the speaker's face.

"And farther north," said Bourhis, "are the Islands of the Dead."

"Why were they called that?" Téphany asked.

She knew the legend; but Léon's voice had fascination when he spoke of the folklore of his province.

"Mademoiselle must have forgotten. The souls of the dead live in those islands. Ask the fishermen. More than one, *ma Doué!* has been summoned at night to ferry the dead across, has felt the weight of the boat, deep down in the water, has strained at the oars, and then, as the keel touched the shore of the islands, the boat has been lightened, because the passengers have stepped ashore."

The boy crossed himself.

Bourhis went on to speak of King Gradlon and his daughter, of her fate, and the fate of the wicked city of Ys, submerged for its sins, like the cities of the plain.

"You believe this, Léon?" she asked.

"Why, yes, Mademoiselle. Men have seen the towers of the city, and heard the bells chime when the waters of the bay are smooth and the moon is at the full."

By a strange coincidence, as the man was speaking the tinkle of a bell floated across the sea, the bell of Nivéz, so attenuated in sound that to Téphany it seemed indeed to be wafted from some enchanted city lying beneath the waters. And the coast, fading in the haze, became a shadowy land, far away, unreal,

indefinable. Only the boat and the water across which she flew light as a petrel possessed substance and form. Out of the silence which succeeded the silvery note of the bell, Michael's voice came abruptly:

"To these simple people"—he spoke in English—"the mystery of the unseen is as sweet as that bell."

The fishing-fleet was now close at hand, and both Bourhis and the boy laughed gaily.

"The fish are there, Mademoiselle. You will see a pretty sight."

As he spoke, he and Michael lowered the sails. An instant later, they nearly came alongside of one of the fishing-boats.

"The *patron*," whispered Bourhis, "is going to sow *la rogue*."

In the stern of the boat, his fine figure superbly defined against the sky, stood the owner of the boat. With rhythmic swing he began to scatter the seed, the cod's roe mixed with coarse flour or sand, which lures the sardines to the surface. The cream-coloured bait fell upon the water in tiny flakes. Instantly the surface flashed into sparks of silver.

"They have the luck, those fellows," said Bourhis enviously.

The crew of the boat manipulated the filmy blue nets, drawing them gently about the sardines, who were intent only upon gorging themselves with the highly seasoned, rank-smelling food. When the first net was full of fish the men allowed it to drift out astern.

The *patron* flung more *rogue*, the fish came in ever-increasing numbers to the surface, following the boat, which was rowed by the crew slowly and in absolute silence.

"Why don't they draw in the first net?" whispered Téphany.

"They are afraid of frightening the shoal away," Michael replied. "Sometimes they have as many as four nets out, and as many as a thousand fish in each net."

Téphany nodded. The silence, the dexterity with which the men put out the nets, the scintillating water, the fine figure of the *patron*—these impressed her greatly. The breeze dropped, hardly dimpling the quiet surface of the sea; the sun warmed her to the core.

"It's fair-weather fishing," Michael murmured.

They went on, visiting other boats. Presently, the first boat left for Concarneau. This one would receive the biggest price from the packers, and much excitement there would be in speculating what this price might touch.

"We will follow and see," said Michael.

In company with half a dozen other boats, they sailed north in the wake of the first.

Soon they were rounding the white mole opposite the reefs upon which Henry Lane had perished. Téphany, since the day of the storm, had seen the place many times, yet her eyes filled with tears. Then she felt the warm clasp of Michael's hand, and his voice vibrating with sympathy: "Poor little Téphany!"

Their eyes met. Téphany withdrew her hand, blushing slightly. Since Michael had shaved off that odious beard, it seemed hard to believe that ten years lay between the present and that memorable day when she had flung her arms about his neck and kissed him.

They went ashore. Concarneau was buzzing with anticipation of good times. Famine had left marks upon the hearts of all, upon the faces of many. Now, the sun was shining with renewed splendour in the fisherman's heaven, and the price for sardines was authoritatively announced :

Twenty-seven francs a thousand !

Before half the fleet was in, however, the price had fallen to eighteen francs a thousand, where it remained. By this time excitement had gripped the people, and the conviction that the years of lean kine were over.

The sardines were counted and despatched to the factories ; the fishermen prepared the famous *cotrillade*, the broth which is their one solid meal of the day.

“I am awfully hungry,” said Téphany.

“We will have breakfast at the Voyageurs,” said Michael.

“But I want to eat the *cotrillade*.”

Téphany insisting, Léon led the way to the house of a cousin, who supplied the big pot and the fuel. The room, typical of ten thousand Breton kitchens, was long and low, with a broad stone hearth at one end upon which smouldered a faggot or two beneath the

indispensable *pot-au-feu*. Facing the hearth were the *lits-clos*; opposite door and window stood a huge oak *armoire*, with hinges and locks of brilliantly polished brass. In the centre of the room was a narrow oak table.

With the bellows the boy blew the smouldering sticks of wood into flame. Léon put the fish into the pot, added pepper and salt, and covered the whole with water. Michael went out to buy butter and bread and cider. When the fish had simmered for three-quarters of an hour, a generous supply of butter was ladled into the pot. Then the fish was eaten. Afterwards more butter and bread in slices was added. The soaked bread was eaten last.

Téphany, with appetite sharpened by a morning spent on the sea, ate heartily, because the broth tasted so amazingly good. She felt herself to be flesh and blood of the people whose simple food she shared. The cousin and his wife sat at the table with them. Each person was provided with a bowl and a spoon. The cider was drunk out of cups. In spite of the fire on the hearth and the hot sun outside, the kitchen remained quite cool. Through the open door, one could see another kitchen just opposite, where another *cotrillade* had been cooked and eaten. The fishermen talked loudly after they had swallowed their glass, apiece, of cognac, speaking of the good times and then in grumbling accents of the enormous price, as much as one hundred francs the *barrique*, demanded by those sharks the

vendors of *rogue*. After all, they, and not the fishermen, seized the lion's share of the spoil. Téphany smelled tar, and that peculiar pungent odour of woollen garments saturated by salt water.

With a little encouragement, the cousin's wife was persuaded to speak of the famine, when the children had died like flies in frost. Under cover of Léon's loud voice, the woman whispered to Téphany that Michael had saved many little ones from starvation.

"He is good, is Monsieur! Ah, my God! one has only to look at him to see that; is it not so, Mademoiselle?"

Her shrewd eyes sparkled with curiosity.

"But looks are sometimes deceiving," Téphany hazarded.

"But we women know, in our hearts; yes. And Monsieur surely is the kindest of men, and deserving of all that the Holy Mother will send him: a loving wife for example, and half a dozen adorable children. Oh, oh, indeed? Monsieur is a *célibataire endurci, hein?* What a pity! Because, after all, can anything in this world make up to an honest man or woman for the loss of a home?"

She pointed to the rude hearth as she spoke. And, immediately, some indescribable spirit of the past seemed to touch Téphany's heart, as she sat at the rude oak table, looking at the hearth which had warmed and nourished generations of fishermen.

Le foyer Breton!

At sea, when the tragedy played by wind and wave held the stoutest heart appalled, when night spread darkness upon the scene, when the terrible cold paralysed their activities of mind and body, did not a vision of this hearth flit into the strained and despairing eyes of the strugglers? Surely. And did the vision of home, of all that these simple, God-fearing men held most dear and sacred, fortify and sustain them in that supreme moment when the outrageous monster engulfed them, because, such as it was, hewn out of granite, it endured from earliest youth to extremest age as the epitome and expression of the true and everlasting home beyond?

This granite fireplace, smoke-stained, chipped by hard use, riven, sometimes, by intense heat, was to Téphany as eloquent as the spires of the province, hewn also out of granite, and fashioned—by what miracle of patience?—into surpassingly delicate forms of loveliness. But the hearth was a greater thing than the spire. The spire represented art in its noblest, most soaring manifestation; the hearth, if it were worthy of its name, stood for life and love.

Inevitably, the mournful reflection followed that to her this love of the hearth was ineradicable, that no triumph could compensate for its loss.

At her request the men lit their pipes. Léon predicted a superb season for the *sardiniers*, citing the cases of those fortunate ones who had literally captured fortune with the seine,

but Michael sat apart, staring at the hearth with a slight frown upon his forehead. Téphany told herself that he shared her thoughts. As boy and girl this had been a matter of frequent occurrence, emphasising the sympathy of one for the other, demonstrating, so to speak, the strength and value of their friendship.

Léon, intent upon bringing every topic into the charmed circle of his love affair, began to speak of Yannik and their marriage. Téphany noticed that Michael listened with attention to the simple story. How many times had a similar tale been told in this ancient kitchen ?

"The old woman will live with us," he addressed his cousins. "Eh, what? A nuisance that? Yes. But one must take the rough with the smooth. *La vieille* has too many wrinkles on her face and on her heart, poor soul! but Yannik's skin is smooth as satin. Name of a pipe, I am not the only one who thinks so."

They sailed back with the north-west breeze behind them, meeting many belated boats. The men shouted greetings to Bourhis as they passed. Fortune had not come to all, but the luck on the whole was marvellously good, and the fame of it would attract the Douarnenez fleet and perhaps the fishermen of Lorient. Léon, usually so quiet and reserved, but warmed into speech by excitement and the prospect of good times, prattled gaily of the sea, speaking of her in absurdly carressing tones as the good little mother with milk in plenty for all her

children. Ah, well, this was his world ; he knew no other ; it had been his cradle often ; it might be his grave. Michael listened to the talk and the laughter as he steered the boat, but he gazed—so Téphany noticed—into the mysterious horizon where sea melted into sky, and sky into sea, both indivisible in the shadows of twilight.

When they reached Ros Braz, Michael accepted Téphany's invitation to sup, but took his leave soon after, meaning to walk back to Pont-Aven. Passing Mère Pouldour's cottage, he saw a light in the kitchen, and through the open door he caught a glimpse of the old woman knitting. Probably, he reflected, she was waiting for Yannik, who might be abroad with Léon. A sudden impulse stirred him to step in and exchange a greeting with the grandmother, and if opportunity served, to say a word in regard to the fat five franc pieces.

“A lovely night, my aunt.”

The old woman nodded, her fingers busy with the needles.

“As you say, Monsieur, a lovely night.”

“A lovers' night !”

“Ah, yes. If one were twenty again ! Moonlight—and a lover.”

“Lucky Yannik !”

“Certainly she has luck, the little fool, if she would take it when it comes.”

The latter half of the sentence was growled

out. Michael divined exasperation in the peevish tone, the frowning brows. At the same moment he made sure that the old woman was slightly under the influence of liquor ; not drunk, but what the Bretons call *cidralisée*.

“ But I understand she has taken it ? ”

Michael spoke interrogatively, wondering whether he would be answered truthfully. Mère Pouldour eyed him with wrinkled suspicion, till she remembered that he was a friend of Carne. Naturally all painters thought alike upon certain subjects. Befuddled and garrulous, she burst out vehemently :

“ She is an imbecile. Look you, Monsieur, that little idiot has the chance of putting five hundred francs into her stocking—and she refuses to take it. What do you say to that ? ”

“ Five hundred francs ! ”

“ Five hundred francs, Monsieur, not a sou less. And, by the Virgin, if she asked a thousand, he would pay it. He is quite off his head. What he sees, God knows. At her age I was handsomer. May I offer Monsieur a cup of cider ? It is good this year, our cider.”

Michael entered the cottage, and drank some cider, clinking cups and exchanging toasts in Breton. He told himself that he was committing a shameful breach of hospitality. The old woman gabbled on :

“ It is like this, Monsieur ; you are an artist, and you will understand. Your friend, Mon-

sieur Carne, has asked Yannik to do him a little service—a bagatelle. He wants to paint her white skin, which it seems is of a whiteness and texture, so he tells me, to drive a painter mad. Look you, he cares nothing for the little idiot, save as a model. There are painters who have come to Pont-Aven—well, well, we need not speak of them. Monsieur Carne has asked Yannik to take off some of her clothes ; not all, no indeed. To the waist—nothing more. As usual, I shall be present. Nobody else will be the wiser. And she refuses—name of a dog ! If you would speak a word to her, Monsieur. And it means marriage."

"And Léon Bourhis ?"

"Pouf-f-f ! He is young, and a fool, too. All young people are fools—fools ; that is understood."

"I will speak to Yannik, as you wish it. Good-night."

"Good-night, Monsieur ; and thank you."

"Do not thank me." Michael's voice was harsh. "You understand that if I speak to Yannik it is entirely on her account, not on yours."

"Why, of course, Monsieur."

Michael walked away, smiling grimly because, in the most reprehensible fashion, he had so successfully salved his conscience and thrown dust in the old woman's eyes.

He walked swiftly towards Pont-Aven, wondering what had become of Yannik. He had made so certain, the old woman was as

certain, that the girl was with her lover in the moonlight. If she were with Carne—

A dozen half-forgotten incidents lent colour to the conjecture. Their relations, being already of such an intimate nature that Carne had asked her to pose for the figure, warranted the fear that the first indignant refusal would yield to importunity. Yannik's capricious treatment of Léon, her April moods, the obvious influence which Carne exercised over her—all these were factors in a conclusion from which, nevertheless, he shrank.

"It is impossible," Michael muttered to himself.

And yet the anger quickening his pulses told him that it was not impossible. Carne loved Téphany; he wished to make her his wife, his companion, his chum; but if he were weak in character—and Michael had no reason to believe him strong—could he withstand, he, so susceptible to all forms of beauty, the temptation to seize it, if it were offered?

With these thoughts biting into his mind, Michael came to the parting of the ways. The road to Pont-Aven lies to the right, the short cut through orchards and fields and moorland turns sharply to the left. Here he hesitated. If Carne were with Yannik, the odds were overwhelming that he had told her to meet him at some spot on or near the path.

He took the path.

It slopes gradually to the river, skirting the indentations of the estuary, winding through

tiny valleys and over miniature hills till it reaches the deserted chapel of Trimour. Many times between Trimour and Ros Braz Michael stopped to listen, straining his ears to catch some whisper borne on the breeze. Not a sound reached him, save the occasional mournful hoot of an owl and the croaking of the frogs in the water-meadows. The chapel itself is not unlike that at Trémalo, and lies about halfway between Ros Braz and Pont-Aven. A small pardon for children takes place there each summer. The chapel during the rest of the year is kept locked. Some peasant, who lives a couple of hundred yards away, keeps the key, and will show the chapel on demand to any one who wishes to see it.

Michael crossed a low wall, and stood upon the fine piece of turf surrounding the chapel. Upon this the trees cast dark shadows. Michael's eyes pierced the shadows, but he saw and heard nothing. At once, with an odd reaction of conviction, he told himself that Carne was not the man to ask Yannik to meet him near a place which she regarded as holy ground.

The chapel had been built at a time when the raising of temples to God had been esteemed the noblest work of men's hands. During the period preceding the Renaissance all manifestations of Art were essentially links binding the finite to the Infinite. The greater the artist the more clearly did he interpret the divine Spirit working within him. From its

first inception his masterpiece was dedicated to God. It had often struck Michael that in Brittany, and in Brittany alone, something of the original feeling and design still lingered—moribund, it is true, but even so an influence that permeated life and thought. Elsewhere, the pictures of Raphael and Lionardo, the embroideries of vestments and altar-cloths, the embellishment of church plate, the designs of the Gothic architects, had been transmuted to the service of man, to the building and furnishing of his palaces and châteaux.

Brittany had spent millions upon its churches, chapels, ossuaries, and Calvaries; but its palaces could be counted on the fingers of one hand. The people still lived in plain houses, content with plain furniture and plain food. One meal a day sufficed the fishermen, as strong a race of men as may be found in the world.

To-night these thoughts filled Michael's mind as he gazed at the chapel of Trimour, seeing clearly the worshippers now long dead, hearing their fervent voices, feeling, subtly but unmistakably, that their labours, their prayers, their fasts had not been made in vain.

Suddenly, out of the shadows and silence, he heard a real voice—a woman's voice—raised in supplication. The words were unintelligible; but the intonation, tender, pleading, thrilling with emotion, penetrated every fibre of Michael's being. For the moment he believed that he had been bewitched, that a

creature of his fancy had found speech ; then, repudiating this as absurd, he realised that the voice was that of a fellow-creature in distress, calling upon God to deliver her. A moment later he recognised Yannik.

His first impulse urged him to leave the spot as quietly and quickly as possible. He shrank from the possibility of discovery, analysing the situation for Yannik and himself. Why had he been brought upon a seemingly fool's errand to this unfrequented spot ? Was it possible that he was the instrument by which the aid this child entreated might be given to her ?

He walked to the south-east corner of the chapel. Under the east window, in the moonlight, knelt Yannik. Her hands, which held a rosary, looked curiously white and delicate ; her upturned face, beneath the coif, showed a milky transparency. Michael paused, as the years rolled back, revealing another kneeling figure—Téphany, in the Concarneau studio, beseeching God to save the father who, at that moment, was being hurled upon the reefs. Yannik was nothing to Michael ; Téphany had been very dear ; and yet Téphany's distress had quickened an abominable desire to transfer it to paper, whereas now sympathy filled mind and heart.

“Yannik——”

She sprang to her feet, trembling, glancing from right to left, attempting to localise the unknown voice.

"Don't be afraid. It is I—Ossory."

He approached her.

"If you are in trouble, will you let me help you?"

She shook her head dolefully, too frightened to speak.

"Perhaps I can guess what your trouble is," he continued.

At this she plucked up enough courage to raise her eyes.

"You have been asked to pose for the figure?"

"Monsieur—who has told you?"

"Your grandmother."

Even in the moonlight Michael detected a look of relief. Yannik, evidently, had feared that Carne had been babbling. The girl's face softened.

"Poor grand'mère," she sighed.

"You have said 'No'?"

"Ah, yes, Monsieur, many times; but—but—"

Her indecision, her distress were pitiful. Michael said nothing. It was easy to divine what was passing in the girl's mind—her instinct to submit, to obey, and perhaps, above all, the passionate desire not to displease her grandmother.

"Yannik—"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"I am going to ask you a very serious question; and I ask it here, upon the spot where you were kneeling a moment ago.

You wish to marry Léon—from the bottom of your heart?"

As he spoke he grasped her hands, holding them firmly, compelling her eyes to meet his. Her glance was timid, distressful, but quite honest.

"Yes, yes, Monsieur. And if I do what—what I am asked to do, and if Léon hears of it, he will cast me off. I know he will."

The tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Because you felt that you were weak, or, shall I say, because you felt that the others were stronger than you, you came here to-night to pray?"

"Yes, Monsieur"; then, in a more confident tone she added, with childish simplicity: "Naturally, Our Lady doesn't grant all prayers, no; but sometimes, often, yes. I came here last summer, when I was in despair because I could not sell my dolls. Well"—her voice rang out triumphantly—"I sold them before the end of the month."

"I think," said Michael gravely, "that your prayers to-night will be answered as you wish. Run along home."

He patted her hands as he released them. She looked at him gratefully, accepting his assurance with confidence; then turned and flitted away into the shadows of the trees.

CHAPTER XIII

YVONNE LETS FALL A HINT

The future comes not from before to meet us, but streams up from behind, over our heads.

UPON the following morning Carne was breakfasting as usual in the old panelled dining-room, still used for the informal first meal. At the end of the table sat five charming young ladies, very enterprising amateurs, who were on a sketching tour, and head over heels in love with Art. They talked joyously and hopefully of their "work." Before midday some of them would be in despair; but always youth, stimulated by Yvonne's excellent food, would urge them to fresh efforts in the afternoon. Each girl had three canvases in hand: a peep-of-day effect of a shot-silk grey, a bit of noon sunshine, and a nocturne in purple and gold. They glanced at Carne with interest, because Johnnie Keats, who rose late, had assured them that he was a genius; and they looked also at a rather picturesque Scotchman, an Associate, who was talking very confidentially with Sir Japhet. Carne, too, kept his eyes and ears upon the Scot, who

had been heard to declare that a month at Pont-Aven, during the season, was worth four hundred a year to him. He painted few pictures in Brittany ; but he sold many, painted elsewhere, especially to Americans. According to Johnnie Keats, Angus M'Vittie "rolled" possible buyers consummately, and Mistress M'Vittie "rolled" the wives, while Miss M'Vittie "rolled" the daughters. Carne could hear the canny Scot whispering to the great man :

"Sir Japhet, ye'll agree with me that there can be no fundamental success in art or medicine without beesness abeelity ?"

"Quite, quite," assented Sir Japhet.

"It's the age of self-advertisement, and it wad be a lee if I denied that I tak' my times as I find it."

"Yes, yes," said Sir Japhet, who was slightly hard of hearing. "One misses one's *Times* here, although I do get the weekly edition."

"And ye'll note this, Sir Japhet : in the strenuous competeetion of the day an artist canna say 'No' to a reasonable offer for his wark. Ye'll kindly bear that in mind, if ye should tak' a fancy to ony wee banks an' braes o' mine ye may see here. And between a man like yersel' an' me the price wad be a' richt."

Carne nearly choked when he heard this. And when, a moment later, the Scot demanded eggs from one of the maids, the Californian wished that he could have the privilege of supplying and delivering some "extra French" ones. Such a fellow ought

to be pilloried. Then his sense of humour asserted itself. After all, M'Vittie was honest enough to put his desire into words. All painters liked to sell their stuff, and a cheque was an uncommonly handsome form of acknowledging merit. He began to wonder what his yet unpainted picture of Yannik would fetch when he caught Téphany's name.

"Ma wife says that we've a nightingale in Pont-Aven."

"Do they sing in July, Mr. M'Vittie?"

"She means Marie de Lautrec, the new singer. And *incog*—! She's known here as Miss Lane."

So the cat was loose at last—an almost inevitable incident now that the world and his wife were coming to Pont-Aven. Sir Japhet coughed discreetly.

"I know the young lady; she is a friend of mine."

"Not a patient, Sir Japhet, I hope."

"A friend, Mr. M'Vittie. Miss Lane was born here. If you have discovered her little secret, pray keep it to yourself."

He rose and left the room. Carne wondered whether Téphany had been a patient. At this moment Yvonne passed through the room and, seeing the Californian, paused for a moment's chat. Next to her *anciens* in favour the genial landlady placed Carne. He had promised to paint a panel; and he adored Pont-Aven. To all painters Yvonne loved to talk "shop." The shibboleth of the studios, the

Montmartre and Quartier Latin slang, never failed to unlock the doors of a cellar-like memory stored with well-matured anecdotes. During the season, however, she was much too busy to consider days other than those of the present or future. Carne, with his quick perceptions, divined that she had an object in stopping to speak to him.

"You are content, Monsieur? Everything goes well?"

"Everything goes very well indeed," Carne replied.

Yvonne glanced about her. The young ladies had just left the room. Their laughter could be heard as they sorted sketching umbrellas and paint-boxes piled in a heap upon the long green bench outside. Two men at the end of the table entered into a warm discussion concerning the modernity of Leonardo da Vinci's technique. Yvonne lowered her voice:

"You have found something good at Ros Braz?"

Carne frowned. He was not quite sure whether Yvonne was alluding to Yannik or Téphany.

"Everything is good at Ros Braz, Mademoiselle, except perhaps the cider."

Yvonne's shrewd eyes twinkled. Carne's glib evasion of her question answered it. Too straightforward herself to take other than a short cut, she continued bluntly:

"You have made little Yannik pose for you."

Carne shrugged his shoulders.

“*Made?*”

“Is it the wrong word?”

“There has been no compulsion, I can assure you. How did you know? I have tried to keep the fact dark. People will talk such nonsense.”

“I hear everything,” said Yvonne, chuckling softly; then, in a graver tone, she concluded: “It is a pity for her—and, perhaps, for you.”

Before he could reply she had whisked out of the room. For a large massive woman, she could move and speak with extraordinary lightness.

Carne finished his breakfast, and, lighting a pipe, took the path to Ros Braz.

As he passed the pool below the mills, he came upon Ossory. Michael had set up his easel and umbrella close to the path, but his canvas was still untouched. The men greeted each other cordially enough. Michael looked worn and haggard; so much so that Carne said with sympathy: “You are rather off colour, Ossory.”

“I’ve had a wretched night. I suppose you”—he stared hard at the young fellow—“don’t know the miseries of sleeplessness?”

“Don’t I? Well, as a matter of fact I didn’t sleep exactly like a top last night. I’ve a big picture in my head: that means pangs, eh?”

“I have something to say to you—a favour to ask.”

Ossory's nervousness betrayed itself in a slightly jerky utterance and movement. Carne sat down upon a granite boulder. The young man jumped to the conclusion that his senior was in serious trouble, and about to demand help. Being excessively generous, he said warmly, "Ossory, you look as if you were in a tight place?" Michael nodded. "If I can help you, don't deny me the pleasure of doing so."

"Thanks," said Michael with a faint smile. "You're a good fellow; I daresay you would lend me money if I asked for it."

"With pleasure."

"Thanks again; but I'm not going to ask for anything except a patient hearing." Then, after an awkward pause, he broke fresh ground: "You know that I was a friend of Miss Lane's father?"

"She told me so."

"And I was also, and am still, a friend of hers."

"Of course you are. Who could help being her friend?"

"You make my task easier, Carne. I should not like you to think that I am minding business that doesn't concern me, but, tell me —you care very greatly for Miss Lane's respect and regard, don't you?"

"Yes."

"You would make sacrifices for her sake?"

"Yes."

The monosyllables fell abruptly, but not

ungraciously. Michael's tone implied sympathy and insight which provoked surprise, not annoyance.

"Then sacrifice this idea of painting a big picture with Yannik in it."

"Who told you—Yvonne?"

The name escaped without consideration. Everybody in Pont-Aven knew that Ossory never entered Yvonne's house, although an *ancien*. But a reason for this lay pat to the lip. Between Yvonne and the *patron* of a rival inn raged a fierce feud. Michael—so said the gossips—had returned to Pont-Aven, after an absence of two years, and had established himself at the Lion d'Or: an unpardonable offence. Because of this, Yvonne had cut dead an ungrateful client.

"I heard of your intention from Yannik herself and the grandmother."

"Yannik has behaved like a little fool," said Carne angrily.

"I can understand exactly how you feel, Carne. But you will forgive my telling you that you don't quite realise the issues involved."

"I respect the girl," said Carne hotly; "I like her; I want her to marry Léon—the sooner the better; I'm helping on the marriage. I tell you my conscience is clear. And the old woman is sensible. Ossory, this picture means a lot to me; but I give you my word that I'm mad keen to paint it, because any success diminishes the distance between Miss Lane and myself."

"The distance between Miss Lane and yourself?"

"How can I forget that she is famous, a great singer, while I am still comparatively obscure?"

"You tell me Téphany Lane is a great singer?"

"Why surely, you, her old friend, know that."

"Certainly, I did not know it."

"All Pont-Aven will know it in a week. She sings under the name of de Lautrec."

"It was her mother's name. This is very astonishing."

"She has chosen to come back here as Téphany Lane. One can guess at reasons: the wish for rest—"

"Famous," repeated Michael absently, "famous, little Téphany; it seems incredible, incredible—"

"That she should not have told you."

"No," Michael replied coldly, "her silence is most natural; she thought that her success would throw limelight upon my failure. I am glad—glad that she has succeeded."

"But you will admit that her success makes it harder for me?"

Michael considered; after a pause he said with conviction:

"She will marry the man she loves, no one else."

"And if she takes me, she won't have to give up her profession," said Carne eagerly.

'I should not wish it. We could live in London or Paris; she could sing, I should paint.'

"You have thought it all out. Forgive me, I had no wish to sneer; you are right to think of her. Now, I will speak plainly. I understand how you feel about this picture. All the same," he gripped the Californian's arm, "you must give it up. Paint it, and if you gain the world, you will lose the woman you love."

"This is amazing."

"She resented your persuading Yannik to remove her coif."

"Yannik needed little persuasion. She wanted me to paint her hair. Surely, you, Ossory, don't share Miss Lane's views?"

"I feel as she does," said Michael.

"I shall not paint Yannik," said Carne, after a long pause. "You have done me a great service—a very great service."

"What is the finest picture that ever was painted compared to the happiness of a good woman?" Michael asked the question in a loud voice, as if stating something that experience had proved to be true. Then, with a curt nod of dismissal, he picked up his palette.

Carne understood that no more was to be said. He shook hands with Ossory, thanked him again, and instead of going on to Ros Braz strolled back to Pont-Aven and into the Bois d'Amour. Here he sat down to reflect upon what had passed. A delightful exhilaration

pervaded him, for he told himself that Ossory would not have interfered in a matter so delicate without sufficient reason. It seemed fairly obvious that an old friend had spoken a word in season on behalf of Téphany, whose happiness he must consider to be imperilled. At the same time, with the acuteness of a son of the Golden West, Carne tried to interpret the peculiar expression upon Ossory's face, when he admitted that he shared Téphany's prejudices. More, it was a rather curious coincidence that Yvonne should have let fall a hint that same morning. Finally, he told himself that he must talk over these strange things with Johnnie Keats.

Meanwhile, Johnnie was painting the poplars below the bridge from a coign of vantage on the left bank of the Aven. What flesh tints were to Carne, poplars were to Johnnie. He liked also the life in and about the pool ; the coming and going of the great carts laden with sand, the colour of the craft, the lithe bodies of the urchins who bathed at high tide, the laughter and chaff of the girls washing linen in the sluice above the first mill, the reflection of their coifs and collars in the water. Of these things and people Johnnie spoke genially and not without humour ; but poplars he treated seriously from ten to twelve each morning. When he saw Carne approaching from Pont-Aven, he blinked his eyes, and murmured : "I am jiggered." Then, as Carne joined him,

he added: "What's the matter with Ros Braz?"

"Johnnie, I'm going to hunt for another model."

"W-w-what!"

Then Carne told his story; at the end Johnnie admitted regretfully that, under the peculiar circumstances, the masterpiece must be "chucked." Then he added with conviction: "All the same, I feel in my bones that the Luxembourg would have wanted it."

"I'd give up more than that for her," said Carne.

"What you have done ought to melt a stone. I think Miss Lane the daisiest girl I know—bar one."

"Eh?"

"Clinton," said Keats uneasily, "I have not been quite square with you; I have not played ball. From the first you let me know how much you thought of Miss Lane, but I—well, I—" He blushed scarlet.

"Heavens, you're not in love too?"

"Miss Machin has corralled me."

"I'm as blind as a bat not to have found you out. Why, my dear old Johnnie, this is splendid. You know, I've been worrying a bit, because I felt that if I was lucky enough to win the wife I want, what would become of you?"

"That has bothered me, Clinton."

"And Miss Machin—is she——"

Keats became very confused.

"I don't know ; it's quite impossible to say. I've put in some good work, but who is a judge of his own work ? Not I, certainly."

He laughed nervously, adding with his deprecating smile :

"Women are like poplars to me, only more so ; they catch my eye in any landscape, but my eye can't catch them."

"Your eyes are all right. I say, when are you going to——"

"I thought of writing ; I'm tongue-tied."

"Tongue-tied ? You ?"

At that Keats made confession, laying bare his soul. Did Clinton remember little Mamie Schermerhorn ? Clinton remembered her perfectly. She had belonged to their dancing-class ; a charmer with ultramarine eyes and two immense yellow pigtails. Every boy in the class worshipped Mamie.

"She adored me," said Keats. He blushed when he said it. Then he added : "I was not bald then, and I had a figure."

"Mamie adored you, eh ?"

"I met her two years ago in Paris. She also is very stout now, and has four children ; one little girl the living image of what she used to be. She told me she had loved me to distraction. If I had known it !" Keats sighed, "if I had only known it ! What good times I missed ! Afterwards, it was the same old story. I was never able to tell the girls that I liked them ; I never dared ask if they liked me."

"You must ask Miss Machin if she likes you

at once," said Carne, with authority, "and not by letter."

Keats abstractedly put a brush filled with green paint into his mouth.

"She will be scared to death," he muttered.
"Dash it, what am I doing?"

"Scared or not, you've got to speak."

"So have you, Clinton. Somehow, that makes it easier for me."

"In this case you must lead the way; I have reasons—good ones, too. Why not this afternoon—"

"How you rush one!"

"I've seen you flattening your nose against shop-windows, staring at things you wanted to and could buy, but didn't."

"Perhaps I thought I might lay out my money to better advantage," said Keats, with dignity.

"Oh, oh! You think there may be others—"

"Never! I'm up against the real thing." He was terribly serious, but his slang clung to him. "I wish I wer'n't so bald. Somehow a bald man making love strikes me as being rather ridiculous. Confound it!" he concluded with exasperation, "nearly everything about me is ridiculous, except my feeling for her."

"She likes you," said Carne with decision. "Now, Johnnie, every minute you waste is precious. Remember the good time you might have had with Mamie Schermerhorn. Strike while the iron is hot."

"I'm hot enough," said Johnnie, wiping his forehead, "but somehow when I find myself with her I get cold feet."

"This afternoon, you go to Ros Braz—alone."

"If you——"

"I have particular business here. Johnnie, are you a man or a mouse?"

"I'm a man," declared Keats valiantly.

"By the way, you can mention, casually, to Miss Lane that I have given up the idea of painting Yannik."

"I'll rub it in well," replied Johnnie.

Accordingly, after luncheon, John Keats rowed himself down to Ros Braz, where for the present we will leave him in good company. Carne saw his friend start, wishing him luck and pluck. Then he returned to the hotel, asked for a few minutes' private talk with Yvonne, and learned from the pretty little *bonne* in the office that Mademoiselle was in her garden, which lies up the hill on the right of the road leading to Quimperlé.

Carne smiled as he climbed the hill, because Yvonne loved her garden, and was never happier than when she was counting her rows of peas and lettuces, and speculating as to the probable number of ripe melons. At such times, as Carne was well aware, she might be induced to forget the heavy responsibilities which lay at the foot of the hill, and chat comfortably of lighter matters at the top. She

greeted him with a beaming smile and the remark that the rain had accomplished wonders.

"All the same it has brought slugs," she added.

"I climbed up here to tell you that I am not going to paint little Yannik."

"Good!"

"You may say that, truly; for, between ourselves, I had a vision of a picture on the line, and paragraphs—dozens of them!"

Yvonne eyed him shrewdly.

"A good head, a good heart, and a clever hand will carry you far. Take that from me."

"Is that all you have to say?"

"Why, what more do you want? Oh, you artists! How you love flattery!"

"I want you to tell me candidly why you gave me that hint this morning."

"Oh!"

Her fine face clouded.

"You must feel," urged Carne, "that you do owe me an explanation."

His pleasant voice was very beguiling, as he leaned towards her, whispering: "I am so discreet, and I have done what you asked, hav'n't I?"

Yvonne crushed a slug.

"How I hate those slimy creatures!" she exclaimed, with surprising vehemence. "And there are men like them, who creep and crawl into the heart of what is pure and sweet and destroy it. Come, I will answer your question partly."

She led the way to a seat, not a very comfortable one. Carne sat down beside her, reflecting how admirably she fitted into the simple garden about them, which, designed almost entirely for practical uses, had charm and delicacy for an artistic eye. Along the borders, side by side with the massive cabbages, bloomed ethereal flowers. It was impossible to overlook the cabbages, but the flowers captured the eye and held it. Another thought flitted in and out of the painter's mind. This particular garden was laid out upon a very steep slope, and the soil, originally, had been thin and poor. Careful cultivation, infinite labour, had made it enormously productive.

Yvonne had remained silent for at least a minute, but when she spoke she came, as usual, straight to the point.

"I will tell you what I can upon the condition that you ask no questions."

"Understood."

"Good. I gave you that hint this morning, because I believe you to be a gentleman." She used the word *gentilhomme*, which to-day means so much more. Carne's eyes sparkled. He was certain that she was going to allude—indirectly perhaps, but unmistakably—to Téphany. Yvonne loved Téphany. And this love had quickened, as love will, her remarkable powers of perception, her shrewdness, her executive ability. But the light faded in his eyes, giving place to an entirely different expression as Yvonne slowly con-

tinued, weighing every phrase, as if she feared to say too much :

“ Because you are a gentleman I am going to tell you something which happened long ago—something which affected me greatly. Even now,” she sighed, “ I feel the pain of it, although it only concerned me in this way : I lost a friend.”

She paused again. Carne nodded sympathetically. He made sure now that Yvonne was about to confide to him some incident in her own life, unconnected with Téphany. This disappointed him ; but interest and curiosity still flickered in his eyes. Yvonne’s nice use of words astonished him, till he remembered how much she had associated with men of culture and refinement. She was the daughter of peasants ; she had led a laborious life, cultivating a sterile soil, as her people had done for generations. But amongst the cabbages she had planted flowers.

“ Do you speak of love ? ” he asked softly.

“ I speak of ambition, Monsieur.”

The word startled him. He moved uneasily, divining the drift of her preamble.

“ I am ambitious,” she continued. “ I can sympathise with all who are ambitious, especially the young. My friends—I have had many friends—have been ambitious men, like you, Monsieur. They come here to me, and they like the simple life of this little world, but their thoughts are in the larger world beyond. They enjoy the present because they think so

continually, so confidently, of the future. I cannot blame them, because I have done that myself. Indeed"—she laughed whimsically—"I do it still. I live to-day in an hotel larger than my annexe."

"I have my castle in Spain, too," said Carne.

"One of the young men who came here had genius—the most wonderful thing in the world. Because he had genius, he thought nothing of pleasing the dealers and the people who buy pictures. He tried to please himself. Ah! but he was hard to please. Nearly always he destroyed his work, painted it out, and began again, and again, and again."

"Yes, yes," said Carne eagerly. "It is the only way."

"Unfortunately, he was very poor, and he could not find what he wanted here. Others had found it, not he. Who can account for these things? One day I told him that he must leave Pont-Aven. I felt that he would find in Morbihan, in the wildest part of it, what he could not find here. In the end I persuaded him to go."

She was silent for a moment. Carne, who had heard a score of stories about her generosity, told himself that doubtless she had furnished the money for this campaign into the wilderness. Yvonne continued drearily:

"He did find—a beautiful girl. He wrote to me, raving about her. He sent me a little sketch, and he swore that his chance had come. Perhaps, when you saw Yannik,

Monsieur, you thought your chance had come?"

"Yes," said Carne decisively.

"There are opportunities and opportunities, Monsieur. Some an honest man and woman must pass by. This girl was not a model, and my friend knew it; but his ambition tempted him to take her, to use her, to—to abuse her. Well, I can tell you two more things. His ambition killed her—"

"Killed her?"

"I can answer no questions, Monsieur. You must take my word for this—it killed her, and then it killed him."

She closed her lips with almost violence.

"You have told me this," said the Californian—not unmoved either by the story or the teller's emotion—"for Yannik's sake?"

"Yes; and for your own."

Carne eyed her keenly: it was impossible to doubt her sincerity.

"Yannik," he said, with an effort to speak lightly, "is an opportunity which I shall pass by. In self-defence, I must add that you have alarmed yourself unnecessarily about her"—Yvonne set her chin at an obstinate angle—"but I can understand your feeling, and I sympathise with it."

He held out his hand, which Yvonne took, as they both rose. In the moment of parting Carne fired a haphazard shot:

"You are not the only one who has asked me to leave little Yannik alone."

"Eh?"

"Michael Ossory spoke to me this morning."

"Monsieur Ossory?"

Yvonne's face, naturally of a sanguine complexion, had been burnt brown by wind and sun; now it became ashen-coloured. Carne had the delicacy to bend down and pick a flower. When he looked up, Yvonne had recovered her self-control, and her face was composed, even smiling. But she said, in a slightly high-pitched voice:

"Monsieur Ossory may have heard this same story. But, in any case, you will keep what I have told you to yourself?"

"Of course," said Carne.

He lifted his hat, and walked slowly down the hill, with his mind in a welter of blurred images and emotions. He had divined the truth: Yvonne's friend and Ossory were identical. Yvonne's simplicity had betrayed her. Had not Ossory been acclaimed as a genius, even by the mighty Gérôme? Had he not left Pont-Aven? But *where* had he gone? Carne had an instinct that in the back of his brain lay the answer to the question. But he could not find it. Then, when he had abandoned pursuit, the will-o'-the-wisp floated back into his memory. He had showed Ossory some studies. One, in particular, had provoked criticism, because Ossory contended that the coif was inaccurately drawn. Finally,

Ossory had ended the discussion with an impatient: "Man, I have painted it scores of times. Do you think that I do not know the Port-Navalo coif?" Also Carne remembered how abruptly Ossory had changed the subject.

"I should like to hunt up the facts," the Californian reflected. "And I suppose they may be found, even now, in Port Navalo." He muttered Yvonne's words: "It killed her, and it killed him."

Carne composed an epitaph of two words:
"Poor devil!"

CHAPTER XIV

ROPES OF SAND

Not for your beauty, tho', I confess, it blows the first fire
in us.

Time, as he passes by, puts out that sparkle.

Not for your wealth, although the world kneel to it,
And make it all addition to a woman.

JOHNNIE KEATS dined with the ladies at the château, and did not return to Pont-Aven till a late hour. Carne was sitting in his studio, smoking, when the Satellite came in, flushed of face and slightly inarticulate, intoxicated with joy.

"She's taken me," he said. "It sounds too good to be true, doesn't it?"

"I knew she would," said Carne.

"There's no accounting for tastes," Johnnie added. "Mandarins prefer eggs a hundred years old; but when it comes to women swallowing freckles and bald heads——!"

Carne laughed. Then he congratulated Johnnie warmly, and listened with sympathy to his story; but on his face was a look of expectation, as if he were waiting for something of keener interest to come. When Johnnie paused at the end of half an hour, Carne said :

" You mentioned Yannik ? "

" You bet ! "

Carne nodded. He kept to himself what Yvonne had told him, wondering whether Téphany had any inkling of the story. Then he flicked the ash from his cigarette as he asked lightly :

" What did Miss Lane say ? "

" Nothing, not a word ; but she must have thought a lot."

" Oh ! " The look of expectation deepened, turning into a satisfied smile as Johnnie added :

" I gave Mary "—he blushed—"details. We talked a heap about you, old man. Mary thinks what you've done is big—stunning."

" Ah ! "

Carne shrugged his shoulders, and threw away his cigarette.

" You must go to bed and dream of your Mary," he said smiling.

" This day has been to me what to-morrow will be to you, Clinton."

" Perhaps," said Carne.

The Californians walked to Ros Braz together next morning. Carne wondered whether they would pass Michael and his easel. Turning up the path through the furze bushes, he frowned slightly, expecting to see the familiar white umbrella ; but Michael was not visible. Then Carne knew that Michael had selected this not particularly attractive spot with no purpose other than that of waylaying him. The epitaph fluttered to his lips :

"Poor devil!"

"Eh?" inquired Keats.

"Did I say anything, Johnnie?"

"You said 'Poor devil.' Were you alluding to me?"

"I had no idea that I spoke aloud. Alluding to you: certainly not. But I was thinking that luck was a queer thing."

"One can't win through without it," said Johnnie oracularly.

Carne did not answer. Keats, glancing at his friend's handsome face, was struck by an unusual expression upon it. Carne, the ever sanguine, looked slightly depressed. And as he walked he cut viciously at the flowering gorse with the cane which he always carried, using it as a mahl-stick when he was painting.

"You mustn't do that," said Johnnie. "Mary tells me that the souls of dead Bretons who have died unshriven come back to the gorse. You may be seriously annoying Yannik's relations."

"Hang Yannik's relations!"

Carne did not speak again till they reached the cottage. The old woman was knitting as usual: Yannik was away washing. In a few curt sentences Carne stated the object of their visit. Mère Pouldour's small, deep-set eyes sparkled furiously.

"Ah! the little fool! If you will be patient—"

"I have given up all idea of painting her, I tell you."

"Yes, yes ; I know, I know."

"How the devil do you know ?" interrupted Carne angrily. He looked at Johnnie. Had Miss Machin forestalled them ?

"Monsieur Ossory promised me that he would speak to Yannik. Well, she refuses absolutely, the obstinate little pig."

"Oh !"

"But I can make her change her mind. And the money will be very useful——" she mumbled on, her thin wrinkled hands opening and shutting as if she were clawing at the fat five-franc pieces.

"Let the child be !" said Carne. "Come on, Johnnie."

"If Monsieur will entrust the matter to me, if——"

"Come on, Johnnie."

They left the old woman scowling and muttering to herself.

Mary Machin received the visitors with blushes. She explained that Téphany was painting near the château. Johnnie appropriated all the blushes, but Carne divined that one or two were for him. Obviously, Téphany was willing to give him a chance. As a matter of fact, Téphany—as we shall soon discover—had not thought of herself or Carne ; she wished Keats to find Machie alone, nothing more. When Machie whispered the tremendous news, it never struck Téphany that the Californians, so to speak, were acting in con-

cert—that the first proposal might be a pre-arranged introduction to a second. And when, after Johnnie had bade them “Good-night,” Machie kissed her, and stammered out something about another man being made happy in the not too-remote future, Téphany smiled, and Mary, blinded by Cupid, saw no derision in her smile.

Bearing this in mind, the reader will not be surprised to learn that Machie managed to whisper something to her Johnnie, and that a minute or two later Keats made a mysterious sign to his friend.

“It’s O.K.” he muttered into Carne’s ear. “Miss Lane is down by the river, below the village. You can wade right in. To-night there’s going to be a celebration. Yes, sir, we’ll paint this little burg a delicate shrimp pink. We must wire for fireworks.”

At this moment, Téphany was wondering what her life would be like without Machie, who had grown to be not the least part of it. It is curious and instructive to notice how well the world wags on when the merely clever men leave it, and how the same world droops and drags when the kind women drop out. Téphany was miserably sensible that Machie’s gain would prove an immeasurable loss to herself—immeasurable because she had been trying for some twelve hours to measure it, and had failed.

She looked at the Aven hurrying to the

ocean beyond, and shivered. A wind blew freshly, and the ruffled surface of the river had assumed the grey livery of the clouds above. August had just begun, but from air and earth and water came a hint of autumn and winter. The roar of the waves breaking upon the iron rocks beyond Port Manech brought back the poignant memory of the great storm at Concarneau. Upon that day she had rushed weeping from childhood into womanhood.

The bitter moment passed. Téphany was so constituted that she could never forget the rough and cruel and disappointing experiences of life, although she had schooled herself to look beyond them. Even now, quite unconsciously, she began to paint in the leaden-coloured skies above her with pigments bright and luminous in themselves. The brilliant yellow of cadmium, the rose madders, the pure, transparent cobalt lay side by side on her palette. Mixed, they became grey and seemingly opaque.

She was staring at her canvas, absorbed in thought, when she heard the sound of a man's step upon the path which led from the château. She looked up to see Carne rapidly approaching.

Instantly she divined his errand: he had come to ask her to be his wife. Escape was impossible. He had known that she was painting here; choice of time and place had been his. With a certain shock of dismal conviction, Téphany realised that the young man was quite sure of himself and her.

Under other circumstances, she might have admired and justified his eager assurance, his smiling confidence in his powers, his masterful stride which was likely to carry him so far on the world's highway. But now an absurd futile rage possessed her. He was about to shatter these sweet silences ; he would force her to speak, to give reasons upon which he would try to trample ; a simple *No* would not suffice such a man as he.

At this moment, too, she felt that essentially feminine weakness which accounts for thousands of preposterous marriages. She knew why many women yield to the spell of strength, yield tamely, with humiliation, because violence of speech or action is so hateful, because so often resistance includes the tearing down of barriers, because denial means the infliction, perhaps, of appalling pain.

She greeted Carne with the ghost of a smile.

“ I have come——” he began impetuously.

Téphany, palette in hand, lifted the brush she was using.

“ Yes,” she interrupted, “ and—and before you say anything more, don’t you think you had better go away ? ”

He frowned, taken aback ; then he laughed, misinterpreting the woman’s protest. Of course, like so many fascinating creatures, she courted procrastination. Her blushing face, her quivering lips, her heaving bosom told a pretty tale.

“ No,” he replied, standing before her, fixing

his bright, ardent eyes upon hers, "I shall not go."

Then, had he been able to read the signs aright, he would have known the truth. At his sharp "No," Téphany's nervousness vanished, giving place to a self-possession which amazed her. It was as if the man's strength and confidence had deserted him and passed to the woman. Her ready acquiescence befooled him.

"Very well," she said simply.

He threw himself upon the soft moss at her feet.

"Are you afraid of being told that I love you?" he asked.

"Not now."

"You knew--you guessed——?"

"Yes."

Looking up at her, he smiled. Téphany felt grievously sorry for him; and the fact that she was above him, that he lay at her feet, that she must hit him when he was down, increased her pity, although a minute before, when he had assumed the air of a conqueror, she could have struck him. The thought came that the ebb and flow of feeling is as mysterious as the ebb and flow of the tides. Carne raised himself, leaning upon his elbow, staring into her face.

"You are the most adorable woman in the world."

She made no reply, engaged in the quest of the word, the phrase, which might hurt him

least. But when he tried to capture the hand that had just laid down the palette, it evaded his clasp.

"I know your secret," he continued softly.

"My secret?" She blushed.

"That you are Mademoiselle de Lautrec, the singer."

"Oh!"

The expression on her face puzzled him, but he continued quickly: "I am at the foot of the ladder which you have climbed, but I shall climb too, believe me. But it is not because you are a famous singer that I love you; it is because you are Téphany Lane. And I am not asking you to sacrifice your great position. Your success shall be dearer to me than my own. Together we—"

"Mr. Carne, please, please stop!"

"I love you madly, madly, I say."

"But, unhappily, I do not love you."

The words, not the ones she had chosen, burst from her with a force which brought Carne to his feet.

"But you will—I mean, that in time—"

"Never," said Téphany with inexorable emphasis.

For the moment he was stunned, confounded; then she saw him collect himself.

"You have heard about Yannik?"

"Yes."

"Ah!" His voice thrilled with hope.
"And you blamed me?"

"Very much."

"What I have done, I should say what I meant to do, seemed an abominable sort of sin to you, didn't it?"

She nodded gravely.

"Unpardonable?"

"Yes."

"I'm trying to look at it with your eyes. I wonder whether it would be possible for you to look at it with mine." Taking her silence to mean permission to state his case, he continued: "I'm going to tell you the outrageous truth. Six weeks ago, I had one consuming ambition. I thought night and day of the big picture I meant to paint. What I have done is not bad; I've been lucky, but I don't think my success, such as it is, has made an ass of me. I was able to measure the distance between myself and the giants. Then I came here. The atmosphere of this place touched me. I had the feeling that my chance would come, here. Then I met you."

His voice softened, and the somewhat rigid lines of his figure relaxed.

"I was painting—do you remember?—in the Bois d'Amour, and you came strolling up the river. I was struggling with the form of the weeds under the water, and I had told myself that the difference between artist and artisan lay in the power to capture and hold just such ephemeral things as the movement of those weeds, the ripples on the water, the glint of light upon leaves: all the things which vanish directly you see them."

"I liked your enthusiasm."

"Because you are an artist. It takes an artist to understand an artist," he added shrewdly.

"So far as Art is concerned, perhaps."

"Miss Lane, the sight of you produced a revolution. Within a week my cherished theories were crumbling, within a fortnight they had ceased to exist. Till I met you I had put Art first; after I met you my Art became nothing more than a means to an end—you."

He paused, awaiting a word, a gesture of encouragement. Téphany sat still, playing with the lace upon her bosom. Carne's voice was harsher as he continued:

"I found out that you were the famous singer. Who was I to ask you to share my life? The thought that I was so near to a triumph of my own drove me wild. Then I saw Yannik." He spoke more quickly, and more naturally. "When I saw her, I knew that I had found my opportunity. One always knows. I became wild to paint her, because I wanted you. Do you believe that?"

"I believe it now."

"Keats will tell you, and so will Ossory, that my best, I may say my only chance, of making a hit is with the nude. There may be Anglo-Saxon prejudices against undraped figures, but the fact remains that, of all things, they are the most difficult to paint. And the man who paints them successfully is at once acclaimed by those who really know."

"I see."

"Yes, I'm sure that I've said enough about that; and as for these peasants——"

"Peasants!"

He perceived that he had blundered. Her tone was sharper; sympathy had gone out of it.

"Because you have Breton blood in you, I must be careful what I say. All the same, you can't imagine that Yannik shares your sensibility and delicacy of feeling? That is absurd. Her scruples were overcome easily enough." He shrugged his shoulders contemptuously and laughed, continuing defiantly: "In fact, I have asked for nothing that she was not willing to give for a consideration."

"My opinion remains unchanged."

"I know, I know, and therefore am I not entitled to some reward for deferring to it?"

"You gave up Yannik on my account?"

"To please you, for no other reason, I have abandoned the hope of painting a big picture this summer."

"You have behaved very generously, Mr. Carne. I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

"I want more than thanks," he said quietly.

"And if—if that is impossible?"

With a lithe movement, he seized her hands.

"Why impossible?" he whispered tenderly.

"Please let me go!"

"I ought to have given you more time." His pertinacity began to alarm her. "Yes, I've been too hasty. I'll leave you now, but

I'm only repulsed, Miss Lane, not defeated. Of course, pardon me, if you are engaged to another man."

"I am not," said Téphany.

"Then I am confident that my love will kindle a response in you. I have distressed you, made you suffer—forgive me."

He lifted his hat and went away, retreating through the trees as swiftly as he had come.

Alone, Téphany tried to reduce her thoughts to order. She asked herself peremptorily if she had raised in Carne false hopes. No. He had interested her. His vitality, his impulsiveness, his temperament: these had appealed to a not dissimilar temperament and character.

Thinking of Carne first, she inevitably thought of Michael an instant later. Michael, doubtless, had spoken to Carne; had warned him. What had he said? What arguments had he used? Obviously, the ethical aspect of the case, however finely presented, had left Carne cold. Honestly he admitted that he abandoned a cherished ambition for the sake of something nearer and dearer. What lever had Michael applied? She recalled Carne's expression of assurance and confidence, as he came swiftly towards her. And the man was no fool. To him victory, not defeat, seemed certain. Why? Since she, on her part, felt equally certain that she had given him no encouragement.

Suddenly, the truth rose out of the mists in her mind and confronted her. Michael had

told Carne that the sacrifice of one ambition meant the achievement of the other. Michael had sent this man to her.

When her blushes faded she realised that she was very angry. A passionate desire to see Michael, to see him at once, to rebuke him, overmastered her. Very hastily, she put together her painting things and slipped unobserved into her room. From the window she could see the lovers upon the lawn. They were sitting side by side; a glow illumined their pleasant faces. Téphany turned sharply from the window.

Then she reflected that Carne would return to Pont-Aven by the path which skirted the river. If she wished to avoid him she must take the road, or else postpone her interview with Michael. Immediately she decided to ride her bicycle.

She was ascending the steep stairs which led to the studio when an incident happened fraught with significance to herself, little as she divined it at the time. Upon the landing in front of the studio lay a silver coin, a Crimean medal; Téphany picked it up, thinking that it must belong to Michael, who occasionally bought such wares. She came into the studio with the coin in her hand, but Michael was not there. In his place stood Furic. The man's appearance struck her as peculiar. Their eyes met. Then the man uttered a cry and pointed at the medal in Téphany's hand.

"It is mine," he said harshly.

"Yours?"

"Mine, Mademoiselle. I must have dropped it."

She gave it to him; he took it with a certain haste and almost violence, slipping it into his pocket, while regarding Téphany with hostile, defiant eyes. It seemed to Téphany then—and afterwards, when she was able to analyse her impression with greater detachment—that the fellow resented her presence.

"You look as if you had heard Lantec," she said. Lantec, it will be remembered, was Furic's patron, who had been drowned. According to Breton superstitions he had become one of the innumerable, unshriven, unburied dead—a Bugul Noz.

Furic started.

"It is not Lantec who mocks me," he answered. Then he hooted in imitation of the uneasy spirit:

"Iou—Iou—Iou!"

"You heard an owl," said Téphany calmly.

"An owl, Mademoiselle? No. It was—no matter. Bugul Noz mocks me, but if I mock in return I shall be killed."

Téphany nodded. Furic seemed to be curiously excited. Téphany endeavoured to soothe the savage creature.

"You know, Furic, that Our Lady will not permit a spirit of evil to hurt you."

"Our Lady cares nothing for me," he growled, melted a little by the sympathy in

her voice, but regarding her still with hostile, glowering eyes. Then he said quickly: "You wish to see Monsieur?"

"Naturally, since I am here."

"You like him?"

"We are very old friends," she answered. And then, without reason—as she told herself—she blushed furiously: scarlet to the tips of her ears. Some subtle, uncanny interrogation in the man's voice had produced this extraordinary blush. *Like*, of course, is rendered *love* in French, and Furic had emphasised the word, as if he had meant it to be translated as "love." Feeling his piercing eyes almost burning her face, she asked confusedly: "When does Monsieur Ossory return?"

"He went to Barbarin's to buy a tube of white paint."

"Please go and tell Monsieur that I am here."

The man nodded sullenly and obeyed. As he reached the door he turned. Téphany was looking out of the window. Furic's expression changed. A curious light flamed in his deep-set eyes; the sullen look gave place to an eager, amazed expression, as if he had divined a secret hitherto unsuspected. Then he smiled slowly, showing his teeth in a snarl that may be seen when a hunted fox faces the pack, knowing that the end has come, but determined to set his fangs in one at least of his pursuers. Had Téphany seen this strange,

almost insane grin, she might well have wondered what she had done to provoke it. She disliked Furic instinctively, and, because of this sense of repugnance, had been the more careful to disguise her feelings with kind words and glances. The man withdrew noiselessly. He was in his socks, his big sabots lying outside.

Presently, Téphany turned from the window and glanced round the studio. A new study of Furic was on the easel, still unfinished, but displaying Michael's wonderful technique and his Velasquez-like power of pourtraying character. Furic was striding into a mist, but looking back over his shoulder, presenting features convulsed by terror: the terror of one who knows that, however fast he may move, what is pursuing will move faster. The mist about to swallow up this wild creature seemed to have magnified his proportions. Furic appeared colossal: a giant flying from a power greater than himself.

"This is really magnificent," said Téphany to herself, but she shuddered as she gazed at it.

She walked back to the window, and looked out upon the pretty glade beneath. Her cheeks grew warm again as she recalled Furic's question, and forced herself to answer it.

Yes; *she loved Michael*. Not with the virginal love, sweetly sentimental, of a maid in her teens—no! She loved the new Michael, but she felt that she could hate him. She

realised that she did hate the woman who had come between them. . . .

Michael's step on the stair aroused her from reverie. She turned to see him standing in the doorway, scrutinising her with a curious, indefinable expression of sadness.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, Téphany."

Without any greeting, without offering to shake hands, she said abruptly :

"Mr. Carne has given up the idea of painting Yannik."

"He told you so this morning ?"

"Yes. You asked him to do so, Michael ?"

"I did."

"You must have used strong arguments."

"They were strong enough."

Téphany, looking down, went on hesitatingly :

"I think you might have left my name out."

"Was it not natural to tell him that, if he wished to keep your respect, he must put an end to his visits to Ros Braz ?"

Téphany faced him bravely enough.

"But you encouraged him to believe that, as a reward for staying away from Ros Braz, he might expect something more than respect. How dared you let him believe that ?"

"Then it's not true ?"

"True ? It never could have been true. Never—never !"

"He is a good fellow."

"If he were the prince of good fellows, what

would it matter to me ? You have caused him and me a lot of unnecessary pain."

" I am sorry. As a matter of fact, I don't care a rap for Carne. I wished to do something for *you*."

The sincerity of his tone disarmed resentment. Notwithstanding, how humiliating to reflect that Michael might have taken it into his head that she had worn the willow for his sake ; that, on this account, it had behoved him to "do something," to make an effort to find her a husband !

" If you really believed that I——" she broke off confusedly. Then, half-laughing, half-angrily, she said : " Fancy you as a match-maker ! Perhaps you are not alone to blame ; that dear foolish Machie—oh, Michael, she is going to marry Mr. Keats."

" And you will go back to the stage ? "

" The stage ? " she gasped. " Who told you ? "

" Carne let it out. He made certain that I would know. Why didn't you tell an old friend ? "

" Did an old friend ask a word about my past, when we met ? "

" I didn't ; that's perfectly true. I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart."

Téphany hesitated. With a faint smile, she nodded her acknowledgments, adding quickly :

" Did Mr. Carne tell you that I had strained my vocal chords, and that, perhaps, I shall never sing in public again ? "

"No. Is that true? My poor little Téphany!"

He had approached her impulsively; then, as he was almost within touch, he stood still, the light fading in his eyes. For an instant man and woman read each other's hearts. Then Téphany moved to the door.

"You are going?" Michael asked heavily.

"We breakfast at twelve. Won't you come back with me? I have my bicycle, and you have yours."

"Really, I—"

Pride flashed upon her face.

"If you have a better engagement—"

"Furie is coming."

"Put him off."

"I am tempted to do so."

"Suppose I offer to pose for you?"

"You, Téphany?"

"Why not? I have posed for you many times. Make a study of my head, and give it to me."

He stared at her; then, with singular awkwardness, tempered by an unmistakable gratitude, he said confusedly:

"I have not painted a woman's head for years. I don't believe I—I could do it."

"You are not going to be so churlish as to refuse to try?"

"I couldn't do it; it is impossible. But I'll accept your invitation to breakfast."

In silence they descended the stairs, and wheeled their bicycles down the steep road.

At the bottom was a *buvette*, and outside it, unkempt, ragged, eyeing all foot passengers with fiery, blood-shot eyes, stood Furic. He looked savage when Michael told him he would not be wanted till the morrow.

"I don't like that man," said Téphany. "I am afraid of him."

"He's a Breton to the core," said Michael carelessly. Then he added: "You will be, perhaps, surprised to learn that Furic has been on a pilgrimage to some Pardon in the north. That's what took him from Pont-Aven. He returned half-starving. I discovered that the money I gave him for posing went to buy a railway ticket to Tréguier and back."

"To Tréguier? Why Tréguier?"

"As you say—Why Tréguier? It's mysterious. For the man comes from Morbihan. He has no desire to go to Iceland, and, besides, this is not the time of year. He puzzles me, does Furic. But I half gathered that he had made a vow to Saint Yves, his patron saint."

"I'm really afraid of him," repeated Téphany.

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They crossed the bridge. At the same moment Carne was approaching the hotel from Trimour. The Californian saw Téphany and Michael talking together with animation, nothing more, yet instinctively he divined part of the truth. He withdrew into one of the narrow alleys which lead to the Aven, and

waited till they had mounted their machines and turned the sharp corner above the inn. Then, seized with a passion of jealous rage, he went to his room, to pass the bitterest hour of his life. He was sensible, for the first time, that he was alone, face to face with himself—with his very Ego, the soul and spirit of him, hitherto shadowy and ill-defined, now of a sudden incarnate, solid, a tremendous personality from whom escape was impossible. He recognised this transformed self as something evil, repellent. He hated Michael; he was conscious of an irresistible desire to injure him, to make him suffer as he himself suffered. Téphany's word infuriated him—the emphatic, disdainful “Never!”

CHAPTER XV

WIE EINST IM MAI

Donnez moi en sourires pendant ma vie, ce que vous me donnerez en souvenirs après ma mort.

DURING the next two days, Carne debated the question whether or not he should accept "Never" as final. In his misery he took Machie and Keats into confidence. Such balm was poured upon his wound as: "Your declaration must have been premature," or (this from Johnnie), "You always get there in time, Clinton." Being young, sanguine, and with an agreeable sense of his own strength of will, Carne rubbed in the ointment in a hopeful spirit. He had "rushed things" a bit, he told himself, and, after all, Téphany was a personage not to be wooed or won like a milkmaid.

Moreover, when man and maid met, such awkwardness as was inevitable became tempered by Carne's admirable manners. Smarting with defeat, tingling with resentment, he seemed to accept disaster with the smile, slightly disconsolate and therefore the more winning, of the gallant gentleman. Machie

said to her Johnnie: "I'm sure the Cavaliers, after Naseby, looked just like poor Mr. Carne"; whereupon her lover replied, with unpoetic discrimination: "All the same, Mollie, inside I'll bet you he's feeling as mad as a wet hen." Then he added, rather nervously: "It must be a cold and clammy experience, being refused by the person one loves. You know nothing of that."

Machie answered nervously: "I suppose a woman feels just as cold and clammy when the man she cares about doesn't give her the chance of refusing to marry him."

"I don't think that happens often in these days, my dearest."

"Oftener than you would suppose."

"What a romantic creature you are!"

The lady admitted as much by blushing softly.

"So am I," murmured Keats. "I don't look any more romantic than a last year's bird's-nest; but I feel like Romeo sometimes."

It was the romance in these two persons which accelerated catastrophe. Machie expostulated with Téphany. Keats fired his friend and hero to more strenuous endeavour.

"Are you sure you know your own mind?" Machie demanded, as they sat together after dinner under the trees in front of the house.

"I cannot say honestly that I do," said Téphany; but she was thinking of Michael, not of the Californian.

"You did encourage him, you know."

"Are you speaking of Mr. Carne?"

"To be sure. Of whom else, pray, should I be speaking? The interest you have taken in his work, in his talk, in his family——"

"And how often have I asked after your aunt, who suffers so dreadfully with neuralgia?"

"If you can reconcile your conduct to your conscience, I have nothing to say." Miss Machin resolutely closed her lips for at least two minutes; then she added, as if speaking to herself: "It is so shocking that this should have happened when he is seven thousand miles away from his people."

Almost at the same moment Johnnie Keats, smoking his cigar in the garden behind the annexe, was extolling patience and tenacity as cardinal virtues.

"She'll surrender in time, old man."

"To somebody else," Carne replied gloomily. In his friend's company he wore no mask. "If she does——"

"Well—if she does?" repeated Keats.

"I'll paint that picture," said Carne violently.

The Satellite lit another cigar, looking askance at his sun, whose splendour, somehow, seemed to be obscured. But when the cigar was drawing properly, he murmured: "It'll be all right, you'll see. You've got cold feet too soon."

"I wish I could believe that, Johnnie."

"You will believe it, and laugh at it, next week."

During that week Carne walked twice to Ros Braz in the hope of seeing Téphany, and he did see her, thanks to Miss Machin. After the first meeting, when Carne assumed the smile of the cavalier, old habits asserted themselves. Carne and Keats drank tea on the lawn, as usual, and Téphany was foolish enough to console herself with the reflection that, if she had lost a lover, she had gained a friend. Machie, beguiled by her Johnnie, held her tongue.

"We must give Clinton a free hand," Keats whispered. "He's playing the brother and sister act now. We know what that means."

"Yes," said Miss Machin, feeling unaccountably guilty.

"Isn't it exciting?"

"Very."

"When she finds that he's quit making love, she'll want him to start in again."

"You know all about us, Johnnie."

"I've made an exhaustive study of your perplexing sex at a distance. One sees clearly at a distance. When I find myself quite close to lovely woman I confess that I'm dazzled, blinded."

"Really?"

"That's so."

A few days more passed. Téphany saw that Yannik's face showed renewed signs of anxiety. Mère Pouldour, probably, had been using pressure, and, after some coaxing upon the part of Téphany, the girl confessed that her grandmother gave her no peace.

"But Monsieur Carne, has *he*—" Téphany paused, unwilling to finish the sentence.

"Oh no, Mademoiselle," Yannik replied simply; then she added: "He has taken away the big canvas."

"I am glad to hear that, Yannik."

"Mademoiselle will forgive me for asking, but how did she happen to hear about the posing for—for the figure?"

Her face was rose-pink as she asked the question.

"Mr. Carne told me that he had given up the idea of it. I am very glad. It would have been wrong for you."

Yannik shrugged her shoulders.

"All the same, Mademoiselle, it was Monsieur Ossory who made me refuse. Grand'mère thinks me a little fool, and last night I left the tripod in the cinders."

"The tripod in the cinders?" repeated Téphany, much puzzled. "Why shouldn't you leave the tripod in the cinders?"

The tripod (*trépied*) upon which Breton housewives do their cooking must never be left in the cinders because the souls of the dead, returning at night to the familiar hearth, and alighting upon a red-hot object, might suffer grave discomfort. Téphany remembered this curious tradition as soon as Yannik began her explanation, and with great difficulty repressed a smile. Yannik, however, was on the edge of tears.

"Grand'mère said I was heartless; that the

dead were nothing to me ; that I put wool in my ears so as not to hear their reproaches."

"That is really nonsense, Yannik."

"Oh, Mademoiselle, I wish I could think so."

"And the sooner you are safely married the better."

"So Léon says," Yannik replied seriously.

Upon the following afternoon, Michael came to Ros Braz. In answer to a question, Michael told the ladies that he had been absorbed in a portrait of Furic, a picture from the study which Téphany had seen on the easel.

"That savage?" Téphany exclaimed, unable to conceal her disdain.

"I have tried to capture the savage," Michael replied phlegmatically. "It's the primal wildness of the fellow's face which baffles me. It glares out of his eyes, unexpectedly, and then it's gone."

"He looks such a beast, Mr. Ossory."

"That is a hard word, Miss Machin."

Téphany said nothing, reflecting with bitterness that she had begged Michael to make a portrait of beauty, and he preferred the beast. She heard Machie's voice, flowing equably on.

"Furic looks as if he had an ugly secret, which he can't keep under lock and key."

"That's it exactly. You see, Furic belongs to the age which had no locks and keys. Men who wished to hide their faces hid themselves in caves or behind great stones ; and sometimes one can conceive that they looked out——"

"Oh! don't!" Machie protested. "If I meet that man alone I shall die of fright."

"The man is a survival of an almost extinct type," continued Michael. "I told you that he went to Tréguier the other day. Well, it seems that his object was to invoke the aid of Saint Yves-de-la-Vérité."

"Why?" said Téphany.

"Who is Saint Yves-de-la-Vérité?" Miss Machin demanded.

Michael explained. Saint Yves, the patron saint of lawyers, is beloved and feared by Bretons as the protector and avenger of the poor, particularly of the poor who are too weak and obscure to appeal successfully to human justice. The peasant who cannot afford to employ a lawyer invokes Saint Yves. Not far from Tréguier, near the hamlet of Trédarzec, there used to be a chapel and an ossuary, of which to-day not a stone or trace remains. Within recent times a venerated image of the saint was enshrined in the ossuary, and to it resorted in large numbers the weak and oppressed, seeking vengeance on their enemies. Less than five-and-twenty years ago it was fervently believed that the saint would punish either with sickness or death all evil-doers who oppressed his petitioners. On the other hand, an abuse of privilege such as that involved in demanding vengeance upon the innocent recoiled upon the head of the pilgrim. This peculiar cult was very nearly extinguished by the destruction of the ossuary and the removal of the image.

"Is that all?" Machie asked.

"There is more," replied Michael. "The priest of Trédarzec, who removed the image of the saint and hid it, died suddenly in his bed, strangled, so his parishioners believed, by the hands of the image. The unfortunate curé's servant swore that she heard the image descending from the garret where it was hid, that it halted at her master's door, and entered. Science at the inquest decided that the good man died of apoplexy."

"Furic believes that story, I suppose," said Machie.

"No doubt."

"I should not care to be his enemy."

"As to that," said Téphany, "the fact that Furic invokes the Saint's aid, instead of taking his vengeance in his own hands, is a guarantee of safety for the enemy."

"Not always," said Michael. "The priests put down this particular cult because they knew that the petitioner very often assisted the saint, if he showed any dilatoriness."

"I wonder who Furic's oppressor is?"

"Probably the patron of the tunny-boat who discharged him."

"Furic told you the object of his pilgrimage?" said Téphany.

"Yes, with the grimmest relish imaginable."

"He believes that Saint Yves will help him?"

"He is quite sure of it."

"The superstition of these people is some-

thing incredible," said Miss Machin. "Tell Mr. Ossory about little Yannik and the tripod."

Téphany told the story, to which Michael listened attentively, with a slight frown upon his face. Was it possible that Carne still cherished the design of painting the girl? If so, he must have abandoned all hope of winning Téphany. At the end of the story he said heavily:

"That old woman is half-crazy, but she has suffered cruelly. As for her belief in the dead returning to the places and the people with whom they were closely associated in life, I do not dare to laugh at what has been and is still held as a sacred conviction by millions of men and women."

"Have you had experiences?" Mary Machin asked. Téphany looked at Michael.

"Experiences, Miss Machin? Are feeling, instinct, emotion to be classified as experiences? I have often thought that the dead, particularly the unhappy dead, do return——"

"Like Fantec's wife," suggested Machie, very solemnly. At once the tension was relieved. Téphany laughed.

"Thanks, Machie. I was beginning to feel uncomfortable."

"But I was not joking," protested Mary Machin. "And Fantec swears that he saw his wife night after night."

"Having previously drunk half a bottle of cognac," Téphany retorted.

Michael rose abruptly, took leave of the

ladies, and departed. At once Miss Machin accused Téphany of flippancy and lack of sympathy.

"You drove him away, and he was going to tell us some of his weird experiences."

"No," said Téphany decidedly. "Michael does not tell anything concerning himself."

"When we first came here," Machie continued, "you were inclined to believe the traditions of the province. Now you make fun of them."

"Perhaps I see plainly what mischief they can do, what lives may be wrecked by them."

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Machin, slightly puzzled, but thinking that Téphany was speaking and thinking of Yannik.

Téphany, however, was thinking of Michael, trying to pierce the crust of his impassive manner. In Michael, as in herself, slumbered—and how easily awakened!—an impish spirit of superstition, small, but capable of assuming vast proportions. Téphany was aware that, under the stress of certain circumstances, she might become morbid; and of late she had asked herself a thousand times whether Michael were not morbid, and, answering this question in the affirmative, whether it thus accounted for the mystery which lay, like a bank of fog, between them. If an innate tendency to exaggerate evil and its effects had made him stigmatise himself as a criminal, for instance, when a man of less fine sensibilities would have used no harsher word than sinner, would

it be possible to change this aspect of his character by altering, somehow or another, his point of view? Then, like a sudden shower of sleet out of a spring sky, came the chilling reflection that Yvonne—good, kind Yvonne—would have no dealings with Michael Ossory. His sin, in her eyes, had been regarded as unpardonable.

Téphany was passing the Pouldour cottage upon the following morning, when Yannik ran out to greet her with a face so radiant that, for the moment, Téphany hardly recognised her. Yannik at once plunged into a somewhat inarticulate recital of an amazing piece of good fortune. Léon and she were to be married within a month. To Léon had been given the loan of a boat, and nets, and a sum of money: everything that was needful.

“Has Léon a fairy godmother, Yannik?”

“Mademoiselle, it is Monsieur Ossory. He has let us have the use of *La Cigale*, equipped, mind you, for the fishing. And all we have to do in return is to get married.”

“Monsieur Ossory is generous.”

Yannik exhausted her vocabulary in praising Michael.

“But what will he do without his boat?” inquired Téphany, after a pause.

As to that Yannik understood from Léon that Monsieur Ossory was leaving Pont-Aven.

“Leaving Pont-Aven?” Téphany repeated the words. “And when?”

Yannik knew nothing: still, it was clear, was it not, that the most generous of men would not give up a favourite boat unless he were going elsewhere, and a long way off, too, because Léon had professed his willingness to sail the boat to England if it were necessary—

Téphany went on her way sorely perturbed by this piece of news. Why should Michael leave Pont-Aven? And from her knowledge of his character, was he not quite capable of slipping away without leave-taking other than a hastily-scribbled note? At the possibility—nay, probability—of this, Téphany found her heart beating. Then a curious light shone in her eyes. Singing masters had been familiar with this glow, which indicated an illumination of dark and difficult places. She returned to the château, and wrote a note to Michael, asking him to dine with them on the following evening. She added a postscript to the effect that she would accept no refusal. This she despatched by a bare-footed urchin to Pont-Aven, instructing her messenger to find Michael and to bring back an answer. Presently, the urchin returned bearing a verbal answer—"Yes." Later, Téphany said quietly to Mary Machin:

"I want to try over a song or two with you."

"You are going to sing?"

"Yes; I am sure my throat is perfectly well. Sir Japhet said I might attempt two or three songs, simple ones, of course."

“What songs?”

“Lassen’s *Allerseelen*, and the *Love Song of Har Dyal*.”

“The *Love Song of Har Dyal*?” Machie’s soft blue eyes twinkled.

“Why not? It is one of my favourites.”

Machie opened the piano.

The songs went surprisingly well, and Téphany declared that her throat felt none the worse for singing. It is true she sang them *sotto voce*, but her tone had regained its wonderful velvety quality.

“If only Mr. Carne could hear you!” said Machie, as the last line of Har Dyal’s song melted away. She made certain that Téphany had changed her mind—that she had chosen this particular song deliberately. What a charming way of calling back a lover too hastily dismissed! Machie continued: “Johnnie has said half a dozen times that Mr. Carne adores first-rate singing. And he’s wild to hear you himself.”

“Johnnie would sooner talk to you,” Téphany replied absently. “We will ask them to dine.”

“To-morrow?”

“No, not to-morrow. Michael Ossory is coming to-morrow.”

“Michael Ossory?” Suspicion glimmered in Machie’s fine blue eyes, but Téphany continued suavely:

“He is going away, leaving Pont-Aven for an indefinite time. We may not see him again.”

"I am so sorry. I like him so much. It is a thousand pities that he should be such a hermit."

Téphany nodded, and left the room. Mary Machin played over the last bars of Har Dyal's song, very softly. Her blue eyes were clouded, her placid forehead was slightly lined, as she murmured to herself, "Have I made a mistake?"

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Upon arrival, Michael said curtly that he was leaving Pont-Aven for Le Faouët. He met squarely Téphany's glance, but she noted in that poignant expression, which we may find in the eyes of a dear friend about to set sail for a distant country, the eloquent question, "When and where shall we two meet again?"

"We have heard of your great kindness to Léon and Yannik," said Mary Machin.

"They will be married at once; and you, Miss Machin, will not be cruel enough, I am sure, to keep such a good fellow as Keats waiting; so I have brought you this." And he presented a small box of tortoise-shell inlaid with silver.

Mary, after thanking him, admitted, with blushes, that her Johnnie refused to be kept waiting. Michael turned to Téphany.

"And you, I suppose, will go back to your triumphs?"

"Perhaps," said Téphany.

"Of course she will," affirmed her friend.

“She sang yesterday ; her voice is better than ever.”

“I should like to hear you sing, Téphany.”

“You shall,” she said, with a slight blush, reflecting how easy it was to deceive such ingenuous friends.

After dinner they sat in the garden, while Michael smoked. In the long grass beneath the trees the glow-worms were shining. Téphany reminded Michael of the bonfires around which they had danced ten years before, of the games of hide-and-seek among the stooks of hay, of the peasants marching home singing, the girls wearing the glow-worms in their hair. Michael remembered well those midsummer nights, and then began to recall a thousand incidents, showing how firmly they were rooted in his memory.

“And our pilgrimage to *la source muette*.”

“*La source muette* ?” repeated Mary Machin.

Michael repeated the legend of Saint Envel and the maiden Jûna. How they had built hermitages on each side of a babbling brook ; how they had sworn not to speak or meet, but always to pray together ; how, one evening, when heavy rains had turned the brook into a roaring torrent, Envel was unable to hear the prayers of his beloved. And how, in his distress, he had commanded the stream to be still. And ever since, it winds its way through mosses and ferns, over shallows and deep pools, in silence—the fountain that is mute. Moreover, old wives still affirm that if a wayfarer

should bathe in or drink of its waters, he too will lose voice and memory, for *la source muette* is the Lethe of Armorica.

When the simple story had been told, there was silence. Then Téphany said slowly: "Michael, I am going to sing to you. Sit here, and don't move! I shall sing only two songs. When I have sung them I will come back."

As she spoke her voice quavered. At that moment Mary Machin guessed how it was with her friend.

Michael made no answer. He sat smoking, his eyes upon the river below as Téphany sang to him.

Es blüht und funkelt heut' auf jedem Grabe,
Ein Tag im Jahre ist den Todten frei ;
Komm' an mein Herz, dass Ich dich wieder habe,
Wie einst im Mai,
Wie einst im Mai. . . .

The exquisite melancholy of the words would have deeply impressed such a man at any time, but sung incomparably by the woman he loved, they stirred every fibre of his soul. He trembled as the sighing, yearning notes floated out of the shadows. Then, for an instant, a furious feeling of resentment possessed him. So the syrens sang to shipwrecked men, luring them to madness and death, weaving the spells of the might-have-been upon stricken, tempest-tossed bodies.

Téphany began *Har Dyal's Love Song*. It

is an inexplicable fact that sound can create colour and atmosphere. In particular, a perfect voice would seem to have power to bear the listener whither it pleases. *Allerseelen* had transported Michael to the cemetery at Nizon, upon the day when all graves are gay with flowers. And the voice had been the voice of a spirit, coming from immeasurable distances, and to Michael—as has been said—mockingly cruel.

The *Song of Har Dyal* had precisely the opposite effect. From death Michael felt that he was whirled back into life. No spirit sighed its passionate requiem of the past, but a living woman summoned her lover to come to her from pole to pole, if need be, across all obstacles. The shadows of the quiet garden of sleep vanished beneath the blazing rays of an eastern sun. . . .

Below my feet the still bazaar is laid ;
Far, far below the weary camels lie—
The camels and the captives of thy raid ;
Come back to me, beloved, or I die !
Come back to me, beloved, or I die !

Michael arose as if in obedience to that thrilling summons. So standing the penultimate line of the last verse came to him—

My bread is sorrow, and my drink is tears.

Then again, the call, the pitiful entreaty, subtly conveying the woman's doubt, her weakness, her loneliness, her poignant protest

against destiny. Lastly, the repetition of the call, affirming the penalty to be paid if it were unheeded, the conviction that death must follow :

Come back to me, beloved, or I die !

Michael turned to meet Téphany as she came alone out of the dimly-lighted room into the cool obscurity of the garden.

“ Why did you sing that song ? ” he asked.

The moment had come to speak, or to remain silent for ever. She trembled violently as she leaned towards him, raising beseeching eyes to him, holding out her hands. The faint perfume of the roses in her dress floated to his nostrils. To him she seemed younger, the Téphany Lane of long ago, wild, thrilled by every passing emotion, but always generous and pitiful. And in the tender gloaming he, too, was changed into the old Michael. The light from the newly-risen moon smoothed the lines from his brow, filled up the hollows in his cheeks, bathed him in rejuvenating beams.

“ Michael, don’t you know that I want you ? ”

The flame in his eyes blazed out, but he stepped back, ignoring her outstretched hands. With a triumphant note, she continued : “ And you want me, Michael—you want me ? ”

“ My God ! how I want you ! ”

The words broke from him with a passion impossible to describe.

“ Then—take me ! ”

As he was about to speak, she laid her hand lightly upon his lips.

“Say nothing,” she whispered. “You don’t quite understand me. What has been does not, shall not”—he caught the defiance in her tone—“part us.” “You said once that between us only silence was possible; well, let it be so. I prefer silence; silence is best. You wronged another woman deeply. I have felt it from the moment we met, and you have endured years of remorse. You may have to suffer as long as you live. If so, let me share that suffering; but its cause I do not wish to know. I had a shameful curiosity once—well, it has gone. Can I make you believe that?”

“Not yet. If only you could!”

He let his eyes turn from her face, as if he could not withstand the supplication, so intensely eloquent, upon it. Then, as if divining that he could not resist her if she spoke again, he burst out violently:

“You are a generous woman, Téphany; you have sung, you have spoken, to-night on the wild impulse of pity”—he hesitated, as if searching for an adequate phrase—“of pity,” he repeated.

“No, no,” she interrupted.

“I must give you time to consider. I am the stronger; I must consider you—protect you from yourself——”

“If I let you go now, you will not come back.”

“I will come back,” he answered gravely.

“When—where?”

“I shall be at the Chapel of Trimour at ten to-morrow morning. If you do not meet me——”

“I shall be there.” He noted the triumph in her voice. Then she whispered softly: “Good night, dear Michael,” and held out her hand.

“Good night, Téphany.”

When she felt the touch of his hand she smiled.

“How young you look!” he exclaimed.

“The moon is kind to you, too,” she whispered.

Michael, indeed, appeared suddenly as the young man at Saint Malo—with features twisted not by age, but by the misery of parting. The scene on board the packet-boat reproduced itself with extraordinary vividness. Details, even, were not lacking: the throb of the engines, the laughter of the homing travellers, the harsh, imperious cry, “Gang-way’s being cast loose, sir!”

“Are you as strong as you used to be, Michael?”

“Eh?” He did not understand.

“You picked me up. Do you remember?”

“So I did; so I did.”

She looked aside, blushing.

“I wonder whether you could do it again—now,” she whispered.

For answer he seized her, and lifted her easily from the ground, looking up into her

face, while she looked down upon his, half-frightened, half-delighted at the strength she had provoked. She half closed her eyes as he drew her downwards, wondering if he could hear the throbbing of her heart; and then—conscious, possibly, of an arrested movement—she opened her eyes wide, meeting his eyes with a glance of mingled surprise and interrogation. Now the moon played no tricks. The Michael intently regarding her was the man of thirty-five, scarred by suffering; and she knew that to him, also, she was no longer the nymph, but the woman who had put away long ago childish things, although not all of them. Only for a moment did he hold her poised, as it were, between the past and the future. Then he put her down gently.

“I am stronger than I used to be,” he said.

“I am strong, too,” Téphany replied, with a certain defiance, knowing that he distrusted not his, but her weakness. Michael smiled as he turned from her.

“Michael——”

“Well?”

“When you come to-morrow, bring the mask with you.”

“The mask?”

“That we may destroy it—together, before we begin the new life.”

He did not answer without a brief delay. When his eyes sought hers, he knew that she would not fail him, that the night would but

strengthen her determination to begin the new life without looking back upon the old.

"You are right," he replied. "I will bring the mask with me, and you shall destroy it."

"It is your wish, Michael, that it should be destroyed now?"

He made a sign of assent. The poignant inflection of the "now," and all it implied, drove speech from his lips. In silence, without looking back, he walked swiftly away. Téphany watched his fine form melt and vanish into the shadows. When she could no longer see him or hear him, she smiled triumphantly, but her eyes were wet.

CHAPTER XVI

REVELATION

Aye, many flowery islands lie
In the waters of wild agony.

THAT night Téphany kept vigil, but towards morning she fell into a sweet and dreamless sleep, not waking till the sun was already high in the heavens. For a moment she lay in delicious subconsciousness, inhaling the morning's air, and knowing only that it was good. Sunshine, scented with roses and honeysuckle, streamed into the room between the half-closed shutters. And when she opened her eyes, Téphany saw a broad shaft of light, in which myriads of atoms were dancing. The atoms were dust, but the sun had transmuted them into gold.

Téphany slipped out of bed and hastened to the window, which commanded a fine view. Although the sun was shining, rain had fallen during the night, and a mist, not yet dispersed, hung upon the river and the low-lying land about it. This mist, so Téphany observed, had subtly enhanced in beauty the fine upper features of the landscape, the noble slope of

the Poulguen woods, the superb curve of the shore, the ancient castle, while obscuring what was monotonous and mean. The mud-flats, laid bare by an out-going tide, shone like vast sheets of silver ; the rocks assumed the shadowy forms of prehistoric monsters ; the fields of the peasants were as fields of Ardash : white beneath the spell of a magician.

Under ordinary conditions—in the middle of the day, for instance—this landscape, beloved by Téphany since her childhood, presented a pretty, but slightly monotonous aspect, not comparable, as Machie had pointed out, to the pastoral beauty of Surrey or Hampshire. That, however, was a partial Englishwoman's first impressions. Machie, later, admitted the existence of a fascination which might account for the home-sickness of Breton peasants whenever they left their own country. But, acknowledging the fascination, she proclaimed her inability to analyse it.

Téphany, however, contended that fascination, whether of human beings or of places, could be defined, and within a phrase. With things animate and inanimate, their power to charm might be measured by their capacity of seeming other than what they really were. The witchery of the sea, the fascination of the desert, lay in this quality. Was anything in the world less interesting than a handful of sand, or a pint of sea-water ? Yet each, multiplied indefinitely, represented enchantment. And to Téphany the subtle attraction

of her native land was as the Sahara to the Sheik, because its aspect was eternally changing.

Gazing at Poulguen glorified by the spirit of the mist, she thought tenderly of Michael. Mist obscured him; yet she loved him. She felt inordinately glad that she was going to him; she counted the minutes, the miles that lay between them. A long vigil had but strengthened her determination to blind herself in regard to the past; she gazed fearlessly and steadfastly into the present and future.

Then suddenly some wandering breeze dispersed that portion of the mist which had changed mud-flats into shimmering sheets of silver. A faint, sickly smell assailed her nostrils, as the foul marsh revealed itself. Then, as quickly, the mist descended, and Téphany smelted once more the roses and the honeysuckle of her garden.

But the joyous light had faded in her eyes as she turned from the window.

When she approached Trimour, upon the stroke of ten, the mist had vanished, and an incoming tide filled the estuary. Soft, rose-grey cloudlets flecked the skies, through which the sun shone with tempered rays. The heavy mist, in fact, had left behind a haze. Seen through this, the hills and valleys between Ros Braz and Pont-Aven assumed a delicacy of tint and tone: alike the delight and despair of such artists as beheld it. The contour of the hills melted into the horizon, so that it was almost impossible to

determine where earth ended and sky began ; from the tortuous valleys ascended filmy wreaths of amethystine vapour ; the masses of moorland were etherealised ; the brilliant yellows and too vivid madders of gorse and heather presented an exquisite harmony of lavender and gold. The sweet loveliness of the world filled Téphany's eyes and heart with a sense of intimacy and affection. Above all places on the glad earth, this place was especially dear to Michael and her. Together they had explored each winding lane ; they had gathered every familiar flower ; they knew every stone and tree and cottage.

Presently, she reached the grove of ash and chestnut and oak which surrounds the chapel. Through the foliage she could see the grey granite of its wall, the flamboyant window, the low door through which she had passed as a child to kneel with other children at the Pardon des Enfants.

Michael, however, was not in this familiar picture.

For a moment she was assailed by the fear that he had failed to keep tryst. Then, with a thrilling revulsion of feeling, she saw a man standing beneath the east window, upon the spot where Yannik had invoked the assistance and protection of the saint. Although her feet trod noiselessly upon the thick carpet of moss beneath the trees, he seemed to divine her presence. She saw him turn his head sharply.

It was Furic, not Michael.

He came forward, holding something white in his hand : a note from Michael. Téphany took it and tore open the envelope.

"If you are of the same mind as last night, come to the studio."

The note was unsigned and unaddressed. Téphany looked up to perceive Furic staring at her with his uncanny fixity of glance. Beneath his glance she flushed slightly as she thanked him for bringing the note. Then Furic said heavily :

"Monsieur Ossory has done with me. Do you want a model, Mademoiselle ?"

"I ? No."

"Your friend, perhaps—"

To get rid of him, Téphany nodded. Possibly Miss Machin or Mr. Keats might want a model. Furic would find them at Ros Braz.

"But you, Mademoiselle, you are going to Pont-Aven ?"

"Yes."

Again she was conscious that the man's eyes were fixed upon her face with an interrogation and derision impossible to describe.

"To Monsieur Ossory, to whom you are fiancée, is it not so, Mademoiselle ?"

For an instant the desire to rebuke him flamed in her ; and yet his voice, though not his gaze, was void of offence. She drew herself up, and answered him evasively :

"I am going to Monsieur Ossory."

"I make you a thousand compliments, Mademoiselle."

Téphany nodded again, and passed on with fluttering pulses.

As she approached Pont-Aven her pace grew slower. She thought she had divined Michael's reason for asking her to come to the studio. There, where he had suffered so much, let joy touch him with healing fingers. At Trimour, too, they might have been disturbed by a passing peasant or a tourist from the hotel. Michael had done well to send the note. Thus musing, she heard voices behind her—a man's laugh, a girl's gay accents. Looking back she saw Yannik and Léon Bourhis walking swiftly towards her with the light, quick steps of youth and health. They walked as lovers walk, with their arms interlaced, their heads close together, the girl's coif almost touching the man's powerful shoulder. Each wore the costume. Obviously they were on their way to the marriage of some friend or relation.

"Ah, Yannik, is it thou?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle. Marie-Jeanne Penker is to be married this morning. She had to wait a long time, the poor Marie-Jeanne, but now she is as happy as—"

"As we are," added Léon.

He went on to speak of the blessings of marriage, using a freedom of phrase which made Yannik lay her hand across his mouth.

"One does not say such things, my Léon."

"Pouf-f-f! I am not ashamed of loving thee to distraction, my sweet little white hen."

They passed on. Téphany heard their laughter floating back to her, as if it were an echo of all the delightful, simple joys in the world. She stood still, absorbing greedily and gratefully that mirthful laughter. Upon the granite rocks at her feet were tiny pools of water, reflecting the pale rose tints of the sky; the leaves on the trees had been washed clean by the night's rain. Perhaps the incomparable freshness of this landscape seemed to Téphany the more fascinating because she felt that the hour was at hand when she might be called upon to leave it. Then she turned her face from it, and surveyed a building to her right, an oblong of new masonry, crude and unrelieved by any attempt at embellishment, standing forlornly defiant against the soft skies—the sanctuary of some unfortunate nuns who had been driven out of their ancient home elsewhere. The building was surrounded by a stone wall, and the nuns within the wall rarely wandered beyond it. Téphany thought of the barren lives it encompassed and confined. A sudden spasm of sadness and melancholy drove the love-light from her eyes as she followed Yannik and Léon into the town where a wedding-bell was pealing.

Michael was waiting for her at the foot of the stairs; but he did not speak till she had entered the studio. Then he said hoarsely:

"So you have come?"

"Did you think I would not come?" She smiled at him, trying to hide the distress which his appearance had aroused in her. Upon the table lay the mask.

"I asked you to come here," he said slowly, "because I must tell you the truth. If then—" He did not complete the phrase, continuing quickly in another tone: "I did not believe it possible that I could tell you; the conviction that I must have been agony."

The suffering upon his face was so plainly marked that her eyes fell. She looked at the smiling mask.

"I'll break this first," said Téphany.

"Wait. This mask is not unique, you must understand. It can be bought at any plaster-cast seller's in Paris."

"I know that," Téphany replied; "and I have guessed already that you bought it because it resembles the girl who came between us."

"It was the death-mask of the girl herself," said Michael, in a low voice.

"Oh!" said Téphany faintly. Her thoughts were jostling each other in wild disorder. What had Carne said? The girl had been found drowned, or— With a violent effort she controlled herself. Out of this discoloured ebullition one crystal-clear determination resolved itself. She said sharply: "Tell me nothing more."

"But, Téphany, I feel very strongly that—

that it is *her* wish you should know everything."

Téphany flushed slightly. The strange use of the personal pronoun arrested attention. The Bretonne within her accepted his statement. For the moment she believed that the spirit of the dead woman had imposed a command upon the man. What was best and worst in her nature rose to confront a phantom rival, whom she hated.

"You saw her last night?"

"I have never seen her since she died, but always, always, I have felt that she was near me."

"You mean that her memory haunted you?"

"I mean that I believe that beneath the thousand superstitions concerning the dead there lies a truth which each must interpret for himself. Last night, for instance, I knew—I knew, I say, that some power stronger than my own intelligence and will was urging me to speak."

Again Téphany looked at the mask. At the angle Michael was holding it, its impassivity, its unconcern, were significant.

"She has changed," Téphany whispered.

"Yes," he said quietly, "she has changed."

Téphany retorted, with a shade of impatience:

"You mean that we have changed: that conditions, in short, are different. The plaster has not changed." Then, as he remained silent, she continued vehemently: "I hate

this thing, because it has made you morbid, Michael ; because, as you admit, it has biassed your intelligence and will. I do not wish to hear its story——”

“ And my story,” he interrupted.

“ I absolutely refuse to listen to it.” As she spoke, she fancied that his face brightened. “ I have reasons, and I am not afraid to give them to you.” Her voice softened delightfully. Then, very quickly, she took the mask from his hand, laid it upon the table, and covered it with her handkerchief. When she turned, the relief upon her face was that of a woman who has laid down a burden. Her voice resumed its lightness and delicacy of tone and inflection. She held out her hands, which he took. Into her face came the expression he knew so well, the feminine hesitation, the ingenuousness of a reserved spirit quickened to entire frankness beneath the spur of emergency.

“ Will you despise me, if I whisper to you that I am jealous ? ”

“ Jealous, Téphany ? ”

“ Jealous, yes ; because you obey this creature of your imagination, who commands you to speak, but who cannot make me listen.”

“ No ; she cannot do that.” He drew in his breath sharply.

“ My jealousy is one reason : the least.” She paused ; then she laid her hand lightly upon his shoulder, looking up into his face. “ You know you have frightened me ; that

thing," she trembled slightly, "has frightened me. I am foolish, sometimes superstitious; it is in my blood, and what my reason rejects as absurd my instinct clings to. Well, I have strength enough to keep my mind free of morbid thoughts. When they come, and they come often, I refuse them admittance. That is wise, isn't it? Yes. And you will understand me when I say that I am afraid of your story, afraid of its effect upon the silly half of me. I want you," the hunger in her tone thrilled him, "I want you, dear Michael, as you are, not as you have been. I want you alone, without—*her*. If you give her story to me, it becomes mine, doesn't it? And she may work evil to me. Do you see?"

She caressed his shoulder as she spoke, raising beseeching eyes to his, an irresistible appeal.

"So be it," he said harshly. "Perhaps you are right. Why should I share the evil that is in my life with you? And, if you do want the good that is left, it is yours."

He took her face between his hands, gazed at it with passionate intensity, as if he were slaking a thirst that had almost consumed him; then he bent his own head, and kissed her.

• • • • •

At that moment Carne was approaching the studio from Pont-Aven. He wished to speak to Michael upon some point connected with

his art, but as he walked he was thinking of Téphany, and pulling to pieces the possibility of a second refusal, harder to endure than the first. His natural optimism, inflated by the windy encouragement of Keats and Mary Machin, had swollen to rather too large proportions. More, he had reason to believe—a reason in black and white which he carried in his pocket—that he had nothing to fear from Michael.

Ascending the steep hill, he passed a couple of girls driving their cows to pasture. They nodded to Carne, and smiled pleasantly. Such smiles, surely, were of happy augury. However, at the gate leading to the studio, he saw a magpie. Carne took off his hat to the bird with mock solemnity, reflecting that if he saluted every magpie he would soon get a sunstroke, for magpies are common as blackberries in and around Pont-Aven.

He passed through the glades of walnut trees, under the archway leading into the courtyard, and ran lightly up the stone stairs. The door was not quite closed; he pushed it open, and saw Téphany in Michael's arms.

An exclamation that betrayed his presence made Michael advance.

"Miss Lane," he said gravely, "has just consented to be my wife."

"Has she?" said Carne savagely.

Seeing Carne's convulsed face, Michael had hoped that a simple statement of the fact would be best. Carne confronted Téphany.

"You have taken *him*?"

His disordered appearance so troubled her that she had difficulty in finding breath to stammer out: "Ye—es."

"Then you cannot know that he has done what you most abhor?"

Téphany was looking at Carne; otherwise she would have seen Michael start forward, open his mouth, and then, with a violent effort, control lips and tongue.

"What is that to you?" said Téphany.

"I am answered. You do not know. What Ossory has done is nothing to me, nothing; but it may mean everything to you."

"How did you find out?" demanded Michael heavily.

Even in that moment of supreme tension Téphany observed that the life had gone out of her lover's face and voice. The dreary tone fell dismally upon a brief silence.

"Yvonne gave me a part of the story, not much; enough to excite my curiosity; the rest I got from a man I know, who is painting at Port Navaló."

"You can repeat to Miss Lane what you have heard," said Michael.

"No, no!" cried Téphany.

"Nothing else is possible now," said Michael.

He met Carne's glance and held it. The young man had mastered himself; he was almost as composed as Michael; his excitement seemed to have passed to Téphany.

"Then tell me yourself, Michael."

She appealed passionately. Carne looked aside, a slight flush in his cheeks.

"Are you going to tell her, Ossory?"

"Miss Lane shall be told everything. Be sure of that!"

"Michael," cried Téphany, "is this necessary? Won't you tell me quietly, by yourself?"

"I will go, if you wish it, Ossory."

"Don't go," said Michael. Then, turning to Téphany, he added slowly: "In justice to Carne."

"Why should you consider him?" interrupted Téphany disdainfully. "Does Mr. Carne think that by blackening you in my eyes he will whitewash himself?"

"I think I had better go," repeated Carne.

"No," said Michael.

From that moment it became plain that Ossory dominated the will of the others, being the stronger of either singly or both collectively. Carne said nothing; Téphany leaned against the table, fascinated by the impassivity of Michael's face, which she could not interpret.

"Why did Yvonne speak to you?" Michael asked.

"Because of Yannik."

"Yannik?"

"She had heard that I wished Yannik to pose for the figure. We had an argument. In the course of it she said that a similar case had happened before; that a pupil of Gérôme's, a young man of extraordinary promise——"

"Cut that," said Michael.

"Had persuaded a girl to pose for the figure—"

"Ah!" gasped Téphany, with dilating pupils.

"That the girl had been treated outrageously, that the thing had ended in unspeakable misery—and death."

"And she told you that I was the man?"

"I guessed that."

"Go on."

"I guessed it when you sent for me. You let fall a hint; it served."

"I remember," said Michael.

"The rest was easy. Obviously, the tragedy had not taken place in Pont-Aven. Then how had Yvonne heard of it? I remembered that she had connections in the Vannetais country; and then I remembered also that you had painted at Port Naval, where I spent last summer. I wrote to a friend; his answer came yesterday."

He handed Michael a letter.

Neither of the men, engrossed with each other, looked at Téphany. Her expression had changed entirely. The defiance, the sense of anger against Carne had given place to a mute helplessness of misery. Michael read the letter to himself. Then Carne blurted out, with a certain shamefacedness: "Don't read it aloud, Ossory."

"I must," said Michael.

"I have made inquiries" (wrote the friend); "the story is almost forgotten, but it created a

tremendous impression at the time. A priest has given me details. It seems that Ossory discovered a beautiful girl called Liczenn Morvézen. He began by making studies of her head. Ossory, so the priest says, was a man of great physical and mental attractions, and he spoke Breton. The girl fell desperately in love with him. He used her love to get what he wanted. He persuaded her to pose for the figure. The horrible part of the story is that this man appears to have been absolutely cold-blooded. When he had finished his picture, he told her coolly that his work was done, that he was going away. He went away, leaving her behind. Two or three days later Liczenn disappeared. It was presumed at the time that she followed Ossory to Paris. A month later word came from Ossory that she was dead."

As the last grim word fell dully upon Téphany's ears, she sprang forward.

"Michael!"

"It is true. She threw herself into the Seine. Then and now I reckon myself her murderer."

Some inflection in his voice touched Carne to the quick.

"I fancy you are too hard on yourself, Ossory," he muttered. "I daresay the girl was deranged."

"She was perfectly sane."

In silence Michael crossed the room, took a small key from his watch-chain and, bending down, unlocked the massive oak chest.

"I am going to stretch the canvas I painted of her," he said, in a chill, lifeless tone. He threw back the heavy lid, and lifted out of the chest a long roll.

Téphany turned her back. Presently, Michael said quietly: "You can look now."

Carne was nearest to the canvas; at once a sharp exclamation escaped him.

"You painted that?"

"Yes. It is Liczenn Morvézen, Virgin and Martyr."

"Why! Good heavens! She looks like the Death Mask."

"The Death Mask was taken from her face." Michael removed the handkerchief from the cast. Carne, very pale, stared first at the cast and then at the picture.

Liczenn Morvézen stood nude, in the centre of a huge arena, freshly strewn with sand, which obscured, but failed to hide, the horrors beneath it. Out of the background glared, seemingly, ten thousand eyes. From these, not from the lion about to spring upon her, the virgin shrank appalled. Her face bore the expression of the martyr: that subtle fusion of resignation, ecstasy, fear, and suffering.

Carne exclaimed: "God! It's great."

The canvas was slashed cruelly, and in particular the body of the girl, as if the artist who had created her, inspired possibly by some demon of realism, had wished to tear and destroy the lovely painted flesh even as the wild beast had torn it. Only the face had been spared.

During the long recital that followed, Téphany's eyes rested upon the plaster cast ; Carne, for the moment, stared at the picture. Michael spoke in a monotone, indescribably impressive, because it conveyed the sense of an irrevocable catastrophe.

"I found her at Port Naval just ten years ago. And I knew that if I could put her face on to my canvas I should paint a picture worth looking at. But she wouldn't pose——" Carne's glance left the picture and settled upon the face of the speaker. Michael continued : "I called upon her mother, an ignorant, credulous, grasping peasant."

"How extraordinary!"

"The coincidence—only I don't believe in coincidences—is rather startling. Do you know that when I first met you, Carne, I seemed to recognise in you a reincarnation of a spirit which once possessed me? I was not the only person to see this." He glanced at Téphany. "Well, I persuaded the mother to let Liczenn pose for the head and coif. During the following week I made half a dozen studies, but I was not satisfied——"

"Who would have been?" said Carne.

"With some difficulty I persuaded the girl to take off her coif and collar. The mother was on my side ; my money jingled in her pocket——"

Carne, reading the misery in Téphany's face, interrupted defiantly : "Any artist would have done what you did."

"All this time," Michael continued, "the idea of a big picture filled my mind. I saw—this. No, I saw it glorified, as some of us do see the work of our heads before our hands have touched and spoiled it. What I saw made a madman of me. Wait, I'll shew you—"

He opened the chest again, and took out a dozen panels, which he ranged with trembling hands about the big picture. Liczenn was presented laughing, smiling, tearful, frightened, blushing, pale. It was plain that the painter had studied his model in all moods. It was equally obvious that here was a fascinating creature. Téphany told herself that no man could have resisted such a one.

"I was mad, and I was blind," said Michael fiercely. He paused, struggling to regain his self-control. When he went on his voice had resumed its chill, indifferent drone.

"The day came when I knew that Liczenn would do what I wanted. The mother used her will and wits. She had attended all our sittings. That's how she salved her conscience. I've a sketch of her—curse her!"

Again his tone had warmed into life. Téphany recalled the days and nights in Dorset, when the letters of a then untidy hoyden remained unanswered. The mask, at which she was gazing, smiled derisively, as if conscious of the ease with which she had lured from Téphany her lover.

"That's the mother."

Michael held up a sketch in chalks. The mother had a strong, deeply-lined face, out of which blazed a pair of singularly piercing eyes. Looking first at Michael, then at the square, unyielding features of the woman, and lastly at the youthful immaturity of the girl, Téphany realised how inevitably might must have prevailed. For the first time, pity for Liczenn began to thaw the ice in her heart. Michael, as if exasperated by the irony of what had been, tore to pieces the sketch of the mother, and flung them to the floor. Then he touched the big canvas.

"Upon the day Liczenn posed for the figure I painted her head only, and I never touched it again. I captured the expression I wanted." He indicated the agonised face, with its passionate protest against outraged modesty. Téphany shuddered.

"When I had done it I felt a brute; but it was too late to draw back. Afterwards Liczenn became accustomed to posing, grew callous as any professional, laughed at the misery of the first plunge, and I laughed with her."

Téphany fixed her eyes upon the picture.

"She had given me," Michael went on drearily, "all I had asked for, and when the picture was finished I knew how it was with her. When I spoke of going away, of taking the picture to Paris, I guessed her pitiful secret. She loved me."

"And you didn't love her?" exclaimed Carne.

"I had never thought of her except as a model. I told myself that I had respected—yes, *respected* her, that other fellows——"

For the last time he struggled to regain his self-possession. Every vestige of feeling had been crushed out of his voice when he continued :

"I pretended not to see; I told her that I should come back. She said nothing; not a word—and yet her face! It was all written there. I left for Paris the next day. A week passed. My picture was framed, ready to go to the salon. I had forgotten Liczenn: I told myself that a lover—she had plenty of lovers—would console her. Have I made it plain?" he addressed himself to Téphany, "that I knew I had treated this girl outrageously, and that I didn't care?"

"Yes," Téphany replied faintly. She replied almost mechanically, not thinking of herself, nor of Michael, but of the girl, who had offered everything and received nothing.

"During that week I was in heaven, and hell was flaming to receive me. Liczenn's mother had my Paris address. Perhaps she told her daughter where I live. Anyway, the girl appeared at the studio. She was curiously self-possessed. She told me that she was staying with friends. I—I had let her down easily at Port Naval, but she asked for the truth in Paris. Was she nothing more to me than a mere model? I told her the truth. She received it with a strange dignity.

Not a word passed between us which the whole world might not have heard. I begged to be allowed to take her back to her friends ; she refused peremptorily. Just before we parted, she begged my pardon—mine ! and said that she had been foolish. There was no scene at all, you understand. Not a word of reproach. We shook hands and said ‘Good-bye.’ As she went down the studio stairs she turned and smiled. O God !

“ Two days later I went out for a walk. I had looked up none of my old friends in Paris ; not a man, save the framer, had seen my picture. I locked the studio and strolled out. It happened that I passed near the Morgue. During the many years I worked in Paris I had never visited the dismal place. Upon this afternoon some irresistible influence drove me into the building. As I crossed the threshold I swear that I knew what had brought me there. Upon the slab of marble, with the water trickling upon her dead white face, lay Liczenn.”

“ Oh ! oh ! ” wailed Téphany.

“ I rushed out of the Morgue. The picture was waiting for me. I took a knife and slashed it to ribands, but I couldn’t touch the face.”

“ This is awful ! ” Carne ejaculated. His face was haggard with horror.

“ The month that followed is a blank to me. I had a sort of collapse, I suppose. My old caretaker nursed me. When I was able to

walk I left Paris, but first I went back to the Morgue. There I learned that nothing was known of the girl who had been picked up. But they told me that a death-mask had been taken. I bought one. Already it had excited great public curiosity. Right or wrong, I did not choose to satisfy that curiosity. I wrote the facts to Liczenn's mother, and, from my knowledge of her, I feel sure she never divulged them. It was generally supposed in the commune that Liczenn had followed me to Paris, and had died. So much leaked to Yvonne's ears. When I returned to Pont-Aven, she asked me if Liczenn's death lay at my door, and I answered, 'Yes.' She has not spoken to me since. That is all."

The inexpressible dreariness of his tone, the sense conveyed of submission to the inevitable, of acceptance of punishment, roused the best feelings of the Californian. He spoke the last word with generosity :

"God help me ! In your place, Ossory, I might have done what you did."

" You would have done it," said Téphany fiercely.

Then Carne knew that he had lost her, and the knowledge of this loss evoked strength. Clinton Carne walks out of these pages a better man than he entered them, and a finer artist. He will paint a great picture some day, and when he has painted it he will know that the quality which has raised him above his fellows, the power of interpreting what lies

beneath the surface, the sympathy and insight which the best judges rate so highly—all these distinguishing characteristics of his work will have grown from a tiny seed of humility planted in his soul upon a grey morning in a studio upon the old Concarneau Road.

When Carne had gone, the pride which had sustained Téphany relaxed. She sank upon a chair, covering her face with her hands. Michael stood watching her, knowing what was passing in her mind and heart, having rehearsed every line, every word, during the vigil of the previous night. It had been written on Fate's scroll that she must learn the truth.

And, being the woman she was, with the inherited prejudice which he loved in her, could she under conceivable circumstance pardon his offence? And pardoning it—if such a miracle were possible—would not the blood of the dead Liczenn stain her, change her, distort her into some creature unrecognisable?

Téphany made no sigh. Between man and woman lay the face of clay, inexorably silent, but no longer expressionless. In the shadows of the studio, the delicate, derisive smile seemed to say: "The woman you love will not look at you." Téphany crouched, rather than sat, in the chair with her head bent, her hands pressed against her eyes. Michael could not recall a single instance when her eyes had refused to meet his.

"Téphany, I am not surprised that you won't look at me."

Her fingers trembled in response, but they remained pressed against her lids. He wondered if she were conscious of anything except the misery and bewilderment in her own heart. He pictured himself as he appeared to her: shrunk to contemptible dimensions. She was the woman to pardon a crime, not a meanness. If he had loved and murdered Liczenn, she might have forgiven him. Because he had murdered her without the tremendous excuse of loving her, he was damned for ever.

When Téphany did look up, he was gone.

CHAPTER XVII

THE UNEXPECTED

I have been cunning in my overthrow,
The careful pilot of my proper woe.

TÉPHANY, of course, had seen Michael leave the studio, but she let him go in silence—not, as he supposed, because the sight of him had become odious to her, but for the subtler reason that she had become odious to herself. She had flung herself into Michael's arms, seeking their shelter upon any terms; knowing that he had sinned, that he had repented, and now, after long expiation, was worthy of love. The revelation of his sin had not changed him; it had changed her. And the change confounded one who essentially was not changeable; whose ideas, ideals, tastes, and prejudices had formed themselves slowly and grown hard, like the accretions of pearl which line a beautiful shell.

She watched Michael leave her, dry-eyed. For the moment she felt that her tears would never flow again, as if fire had burnt out the hidden source. She knew that Michael was thirsting for the comfort and sympathy which

she alone could give. In his dire need she had failed a friend.

For a long time she sat still, trying to understand herself. Then, quite suddenly, she perceived the mask, lying on the table close to her. The sight of it gave a shock, which brought about reaction. Her blood began to circulate more quickly ; the sense of stagnation in mind and body became less oppressive.

She picked up the cast and regarded it attentively.

“ He says that he killed you,” she whispered.

The face of clay seemed to kindle into life ; but to Téphany the strange smile was no longer derisive, but piteous. Then she remembered that the mask had been given to her to be destroyed.

“ Did you come to him last night ? ” she whispered. “ Did you tell him to tell me ? ”

The faintly smiling face was as that of a graven image.

Téphany wrapped a cloth about the plaster, intending to carry it away and to drop it into the river. She walked as far as Trimour Point, where the tide was running sharply. Perhaps the river would spare the image—return it to earth, as the waters of the Seine had given back the body of Liczenn. Thinking of this, the desire to destroy the cast left her. She began, very slowly, to mount the slope of the hill between Ros Braz and Trimour. The physical object of finding the path which led towards the château distracted

her attention for a moment. When she found it, her mind, moving more swiftly than her feet, carried her along it to Mary Machin. The need of talk with Machie became dominant, overpowering.

Machie, however, was not alone. Keats and she were drawing in the garden. Furic was posing for them. The man did not move, but his piercing eye saw Téphany at the instant she appeared. Their glances countered. Johnnie Keats, following the swift turn of Furic's eyes, hailed her with a cheery cry.

"We are hard at work," he added, waving a brush in the direction of Furic.

Machie then explained matters. Furic, following Téphany's advice, had presented himself at a moment when Machie was reproaching her lover with indolence. Furic had asked, with really pitiful emphasis, for another job.

"I detest the sight of the man," concluded Machie; "but Johnnie engaged him for to-day and to-morrow."

"Fate has kicked Furic hard," Keats remarked; "it is a duty to give him what half-pence we can spare."

Téphany made a tiny sign to Machie, who rose at once as Téphany turned towards the house. Passing Keats, Miss Machin said, with new-found authority: "If I do not come back within half an hour, you will please pack up your traps and take yourself and that horrid man back to Pont-Aven."

"Whim, or reason, my Mollie?"

"I am sure that something has happened."

"Oh! You, who divine what is hidden from ordinary mortals, can say, perhaps, whether the 'something' is good news or bad."

"Bad," said Machie with decision. "She has refused poor Mr. Carne again, I feel certain."

"Dear, dear!" said the Satellite ruefully. "It seems incredible that I should be taken and that Clinton should get left."

Machie hastened after Téphany.

When the story—under a solemn pledge of secrecy—was told, Machie, not Téphany, shed many tears, which percolated, doubtless, to the dried-up springs in Téphany's heart, and replenished them. "You let him go without a word?"

To Machie, the letting of any human creature go without a word was an abstention she could not understand.

"What could I say? What would you have said, Mary?"

Machie pursed up her lips in consideration.

"It is so difficult to think of you loving Mr. Ossory all the time. Up to last night you hoodwinked me completely."

"Did you let me have an inkling that you cared for Mr. Keats?"

"No," said Machie humbly. "How could I, till I was sure that he cared for me?"

"And I," retorted Téphany, "was convinced, till quite lately, that Michael had loved Lic-zenn Morvézen."

Before a word of the story had been told, Téphany showed the plaster cast to her friend, who looked at it with a certain indifference, which warmed into interest and fascination as the tragedy reached its climax. Now, with her eyes on the mask, Machie said sharply : " Why should you have supposed that he would love her, after he had seen you ? "

" I made certain that he loved her. I was an immature girl when we said good-bye to each other. She must have been beautiful."

" As to that——" Machie blushed slightly, possessing the certain knowledge that a plain face might inspire ardours.

" And he adored colour and form. When I first saw this," she touched the cast very gently, " I made up a story. Michael, I felt sure, had fallen in love with a beautiful model, and—and the end had been misery for both, death for one. I—I"—her voice quavered a little—" I want to be honest with you, Mary. I hated this girl because Michael loved her ; I hated the image ; I have longed to destroy it, to grind it to powder. And, now——"

" You know that he was faithful to you all the time."

" That is it." Her voice became thin and strained. " It is because he did not love her that my hate has gone, and something else has taken its place: pity for her. Oh, how could he do so mean, so detestable a thing ? If it had been anything else ! And once before—it all comes back so vividly——"

"Yes?"

"When I was distraught, upon the day my father was drowned, he was tempted to sketch an expression upon my face——"

"Téphany!"

"I am sorry I told you that," Téphany murmured. "He was so miserable about it, that I forgave him. But it shows what a passion ambition is. He wasn't thinking of me, his friend, and he wasn't thinking of Lizeenn. Oh, the poor little thing!"

She walked to the window, leaving Machie drying her eyes. More than an hour had passed, but Johnnie Keats was still painting Furic.

"Mr. Keats is waiting for you," she said quietly.

"I told him to go at the end of half an hour," Machie protested. "And I'm sure Mr. Carne wants him, although men are so different from women. This is a terrible business. I wish we had never left Daffodil Mansions. I mean that I wish I had met Johnnie when he was in London. Téphany, don't you think it would do you good to lie down and have a good cry?"

"I wish I could," said Téphany, "but it has done me good to see you cry. O Mary! I am so miserable."

It was at this moment that inspiration came to Miss Machin. She was leaving the room; her hand encircled the handle of the door as she spoke:

"Téphany, I am a stupid woman, and I often say the wrong thing, but I have flashes. Even Johnnie admits that I am clever in layers. My dear, it was not ambition which brought about this dreadful tragedy, but love."

"Love?"

"Michael loved you, and wanted you. The only way to get you was to paint a big picture. To paint it, he blinded himself to what was going on under his own nose: so like a man. I am not excusing what he did a bit, but all the same, I am sure that if it hadn't been for you Liczenn would be alive now."

Then Machie whisked out of the room.

During the afternoon the two women remained together. Miss Machin has been presented to the reader as a prattler. But she had the great gift of being able to hold her tongue upon rare occasions. She realised that Téphany wanted sympathy and companionship, not small-talk. Téphany sat silent, staring at the mask, trying to interpret its changing expressions, examining it in a dozen different lights. Finally, Machie did ask a question:

"What are you trying to find?"

Téphany shrugged her shoulders.

"I suppose," she answered, "that what I am about to tell you admits of a perfectly simple explanation; but this cast, ever since it came into my possession, has looked different." Then, as Machie betrayed symptoms of nervousness, Téphany added: "The mocking expression has disappeared."

" You mustn't let it obsess you. If you would let me put it away——"

" No," Téphany replied firmly.

At ten o'clock, Machie lit her candle and bade Téphany good-night.

" I am not frightened," she declared valiantly, " but Téphany, I wish you would sleep upstairs with me."

" Share a bed too small for you, Machie ? "

Machie went upstairs, protesting. Téphany returned to the salon, and looked at the mask, which lay upon the table. Then she opened wide one of the windows.

The air was warm and still, full of sweet essences : of clover, of honeysuckle, of roses—all the familiar odours of summer flowers faintly languorous beneath the touch of night. The moon was topping the trees which lined the avenue ; and as she swam lazily into full view the stars paled, acknowledging her supremacy.

Suddenly Téphany became conscious that she was chilled. Some cold current of air made her shiver. This was no fancy. A breeze had crept up the river from the ocean, and, crossing the grim moorland, had filched from uncouth monsters of granite some taint of their icy melancholy and hard indifference.

With the mask between her hands, with the memory of the studies colouring the white clay, Téphany began to think of Liczenn. In Finistère all of the older peasants (and more

of the younger generation than they would have us believe) hold that the being who comes to a violent end does not really die, but lives suspended between the Here and the Hereafter till the hour shall strike when he or she would have met a natural death. The mask seemed to smile subtly, as if confirming Téphany's uncanny apprehension.

Suddenly, with a movement of repugnance, Téphany put the image from her. A fear born of early and ineradicable associations lacerated her: the fear of the unquiet dead. Reason was palsied. Her fingers trembled as she laid down the mask; her eyes were averted as she turned her back upon it, and passed into her bedroom beyond. She knelt down to pray, not for herself, nor for Michael, but for the repose of this poor soul which still fluttered between her and the man she loved. She had acquired as a child the habit of strenuous prayer: the faculty of concentrating the mind upon some simple reiterated form of supplication. She prayed thus for Liczenn with intense fervour.

When she rose from her knees peace came to her. She undressed and slipped into bed, tranquil, with normal pulses, feeling upon her eyelids the soft touch of sleep. And she fell asleep immediately, half-smiling at the terror which had shaken her so cruelly but a few minutes before.

She woke about an hour later refreshed and feeling at the same time that a desire for more

sleep had gone. This was no new experience, nor an unpleasant one. Téphany waked like this, always, after any triumph. And it was the moment when the triumph seemed sweetest. Lying at ease, she could chew the cud of kind words and glances, of expectations realised and surpassed; she could live over again, slowly, the swift-flying seconds when a huge theatre rocked with applause or hung breathless upon a note.

Lying thus, her thoughts turned to the mask. For the first time she was sensible that her feelings in regard to it had undergone a change. Attraction took the place of repugnance. Prayer had purged her soul of jealousy and pain. She felt that she wished to kiss the cold lips, to whisper some gentle word of sympathy into the deaf ears. So strong was this desire that she yielded presently to its insistent spell. She rose, smiling at her strange fancies, and walked into the salon. Through the window, which she had left open, the moon, now half way to its zenith, flung white shafts of light.

Téphany carried the mask back into her room, leaving the door ajar. She could hear a dog baying the moon, and from the meadow behind the house came the croaking of frogs. Téphany laid the mask upon the pillow, in the hollow where her own head had lain but a minute before. Instantly she was startled by the curious effect of reflected light upon the plaster. The moonbeams glancing from

sheets and pillow seemed to quicken into life the clay of the image.

Afterwards Téphany could not say, with anything approaching definiteness, how long she stood gazing at this inanimate thing, which seemed to have clothed itself with warm human flesh. Upon the night before Liczenn met her death she had fallen into such a sleep as this, and in her sleep she had smiled, as her image smiled now, not derisively, but sweetly satisfied, as if sleep after much suffering were the only solace left.

Téphany bent down and kissed the curving lips.

She was hanging the cast upon a nail above her bed, when she heard a muffled sound, the sound such as a person would make who had removed his shoes and was trying to walk noiselessly upon a hard, polished floor. Téphany listened intently. The sound came, unmistakably, from the salon. Téphany glided nearer to the door. A curious expression of fear twisted her face, for her mind associated the uncanny sound with the dead, not the living. Téphany, the Bretonne, believed that she had heard, and was about to see, the disembodied spirit of Liczenn.

A moment later a sense other than that of hearing told her that a man was in the next room with only a door ajar between him and her. She smelt tobacco, the pungent reek of such rank tobacco as fishermen use, a reek unpleasantly familiar ever since she had made

the acquaintance of Furic. Unquestionably, Furic was in the salon, and possibly drunk ; for with the smell of tobacco was mingled the faint, sickly odour of brandy.

When, by a superlative effort of will, she peered through the narrow slit between door and door-post, she saw him plainly. The cry of terror which rose to her lips died in her throat. The instinct to hide remained an abortive effort of the mind : the body refused to obey the brain. Nevertheless, palsied by agonising fear, she was sensible of a fascination. She could not have closed her eyes if she had tried to do so. She felt compelled to follow Furic's stealthy movements, to divine, if it were possible, the meaning of them. Téphany remembered that Machie's beautiful silver box lay upon the chimney-piece. Furic, without doubt, had recognised its value ; yet he had not touched it. And if robbery were not his object, what brought him to Kerhor ?

At this moment an owl in the garden hooted.

Immediately Furic turned a terrified face to the window. Then in a low voice he answered the bird, shaking his clenched fist :

“Iou—Iou—Iou !”

It was a mere whisper, the savage defiance of the spirit, as it were, rather than the body. Furic stood exactly as Michael had painted him. To Téphany he seemed monstrous, colossal, a figure enormously magnified, as if seen through some hideous red mist.

The owl hooted a second time.

Furic moved his lips, twisting them into hideous grimaces. That she was in the company of a madman, Téphany no longer doubted; and the grim fact exorcised fancy, leaving mind and limbs relaxed, able to cope with a desperate situation. How could she escape? By the window? No; it was too small and heavily barred. There remained but one avenue to the sweet security of the garden, where, she felt assured, no such clumsy creature as Furic could find her. But this avenue lay through the salon. Téphany glided behind the heavy door, which opened inwards. As soon as Furic crossed the threshold she determined to slip past him into the salon and thence into the garden.

Had Furic entered at once, this excellent plan might have been successfully carried into execution. Furic, however, did not enter. Time, to the insane, has no meaning. For the moment, doubtless, his distorted vision was preoccupied with the owl, whom he took to be Bugul Noz, *le berger de la nuit*. The horrors of anticipation gripped Téphany. Waiting behind the heavy door, she felt herself to be paralysed, her eyes fixed themselves, squinting almost, upon the handle.

After a seemingly interminable period of suspense, she saw Furic's hand, coarse, big-knuckled, hairy, and misshapen. At sight of this, fortitude abandoned her; she let terror escape in a piercing scream. Instantly Furic flung wide open the door, crushing Téphany

behind it. Yet he did not move, nor did she. Through the slit between the upper and lower hinges, she saw that he had not been able to localise the sound of the scream. He was staring at the window, petrified by terror. Then she saw him turn his eyes to the bed. In his hand he carried such a knife as sailors use. She realised that she could pass him, touch him, shout in his ear, and that he would not move because he couldn't. Then she understood. The bed could be only dimly seen, but above it, brilliantly illuminated by a shaft of moonlight, the face of Liczenn—of Liczenn smiling derisively—shone out of the shadows.

Furic gave a sharp cry. Then he staggered and crashed, face down, upon the well-polished oak floor. It was as if he had been smitten by some invisible hand. Immediately pity drove from Téphany's heart the hideous horror that had possessed it. The woman's instinct to minister took its place. She bent down over the prostrate man. He was livid of complexion, breathing heavily, with tearing, grinding gasps.

A moment later Mary Machin joined her. Machie confessed afterwards that she was terrified, that no instinct animated her save that—natural enough in one who had been born in St. George's Road—of sending for a policeman. To Téphany it appeared just as natural to send for a doctor. For she never doubted that Furic had received a death-blow.

Within a few minutes Léon Bourhis arrived. Machie removed the mask, and locked it up in the *armoire* in the salon. Bourhis lifted Furic on to the bed. The stout peasant who served as cook declared that the man was struck down by apoplexy. Téphany explained to the servants and others that she had found him in the salon, wandering about, raving drunk or mad.

To Machie, later, she told the truth.

"I feel certain," she affirmed, "that he came here to kill me. He had a knife in his hand. When he saw the mask he fell down. I tell you, Machie, the mask saved my life."

"Why should Furic want to kill you?"

"I don't know. If he is mad——"

"He was not mad this afternoon, my dear."

Meantime, Bourhis had been despatched for Sir Japhet. The stout cook and Mère Pouldour remained with Furic, who lay senseless upon the bed, his shoulders propped up with pillows, his head swathed in wet bandages. Sir Japhet arrived at daybreak. Twenty minutes later he was saying to Téphany :

"I think the man will recover consciousness, but his heart is failing. I shall be surprised if he lives through the day."

"I must send for Père Narcisse."

"The priest? Yes." Then with sympathy he added: "This has been a terrible experience for you. You are suffering——"

"From nothing so much as curiosity."

Sir Japhet remarked that she spoke with difficulty, as if the effort pained her : a natural effect of shock. Mary Machin broke in upon his thoughts :

" Why did he come here ? If he could live to tell us that——"

" Quite so."

" Miss Lane thinks he wanted to kill her."

But Téphany remained silent, partly because her tired brain presented but a blurred image of the events of the past four-and-twenty hours, and partly because the mere effort of speaking made her suffer. She remembered her scream ; could hear it plainly. It seemed to have been torn from her, leaving behind a hideous laceration. Into that lamentable cry she had infused more than terror. Fierce protest against inexorable destiny burst its bonds ; despair, throttled, trodden under foot, subdued valiantly but not yet conquered, had set itself free.

She walked away, leaving Mary Machin with Sir Japhet. The garden was deliciously quiet at this early hour, but the air seemed unusually heavy, as if overcharged with electricity. Above hung heavy clouds, massed and motionless. Below, the river seemed to be stagnant—a dull, drab-coloured expanse of water. Not a leaf stirred upon the trees, and the only audible sound, save the muffled voices of Machie and the doctor, came from the west, where the waves were breaking with sullen roar upon the rocks of Port Manech.

Why had Furic fallen senseless at the sight of the mask?

The question ate into her mind. The answer to it became vital, a thing of tremendous importance. And if Furic died without speaking —

She walked back, feeling that her limbs were fettered, and that something was throbbing cruelly in her throat. It cost her an effort of will to speak with calmness.

“ Why should so strong a man die ? ”

Sir Japhet regarded her keenly, too experienced not to read the tell-tale signs : the hardly perceptible flicker of the eye-lid, the carefully enunciated phrase, the tense lines about the mouth. He answered with professional curtness :

“ Muscularly speaking, the fellow is a giant ; vitally, he has not the strength of a kitten. The condition of his heart indicates a serious organic lesion. His habits—the man reeks of brandy—are against him.”

Téphany nodded, realising that science had said the last word, had done all that was possible.

“ There is no drug — ”

“ To make a dying man speak ? None, Miss Lane. Still, one never knows ; so often, at the last, a flicker—Ha ! ”

Out in the west lightning had flashed vividly. Some seconds later followed the distant roar of thunder.

“ We are going to have a very pretty

storm," said Sir Japhet. Téphany, however, seemed to pay no attention either to the thunder or the speaker. Laying her fingers upon the doctor's arm, she whispered hoarsely:

"Sir Japhet, you must make him speak. You—*must!*"

"My dear young lady ——"

"Try!"

The great man twisted his mouth, a slight protest against women's whim. Then he walked slowly into the house, as the lightning flashed again with increasing vividness.

"Hadn't we better go in too?" said Machie, anxiously regarding Téphany.

"No."

"I wish Johnnie were here. And, and—I suppose Mr. Ossory will come, when——"

"He won't come," said Téphany.

"May I send for him?" Machie entreated.

"Send? Most certainly not; not on any account."

"My dear, how very hoarse you are."

"I have strained my throat again," Téphany said indifferently.

"Oh—oh!"

"It doesn't seem of the slightest importance."

"That you should live to say that!"

"I suppose we may live to change our ideas as easily as we change our names. I am Téphany Lane again, and I shall remain Téphany Lane."

Machie tried to determine whether Téphany

meant to indicate spinsterhood or permanent retirement from the stage.

"At any rate, my dear, you must let Sir Japhet look at your throat. I daresay you have taken cold."

"Yes, I have taken cold. Now, Machie, if you put on your crushed-by-a-steam-roller expression I shall laugh, which will hurt horribly."

"If you laugh, Téphany, I shall cry."

The lightning flashed again.

"It is coming nearer," said Machie.

A dismal period of inaction followed, as the storm crept up.

About Ros Braz the air remained insufferably heavy. As the thunder became louder, Machie slipped her hand into Téphany's. She admitted that mice and thunder frightened her horribly. Presently Sir Japhet approached, tall and massive, carrying an inscrutable, clean-shaven face upon his broad shoulders. He said that he had administered some spirits of ammonia, and that the patient, on the ragged edge of collapse, had slightly rallied.

"You have been very kind," said Téphany.

"Kind? Pray don't say another word, Miss Lane. By the way, that injunction may be taken literally. You are very hoarse, surely?"

"Hoarse?" Mary Machin rose dramatically. "Sir Japhet, she has strained her throat again. You ought to look at it at once. It's a public duty."

"Quite, quite. Permit me, Miss Lane."

Téphany tried to protest, but the doctor, as usual, had his way. There and then, standing upon the tiny lawn, an examination was made, while the thunder reverberated in the caves of Port Manech and in the beech woods of Poulguen. Sir Japhet's face, slowly changing, grew dark as the impending clouds. At the end he said in the passionless accents, which only a few weeks before had struck such a chill to Téphany's heart, and which now she received with indifference :

"You have no inflammation of the upper throat or tonsils. The hoarseness and pain are due to an injury lower down. I fear that it is very serious. Nature's careful work of the past two months has been undone. You will, however, give yourself every chance. You must go to your room —"

"To my room," interrupted Machie, "the other —"

"Go to Miss Machin's room, and lie down. I shall send you a draught. I think I can guess what you would say, but don't say it."

Téphany did not answer, for at that moment the storm broke violently over Ros Braz. Lightning blazed in the garden ; the crash of thunder was appalling, and a moment later the rain roared down in torrents.

Téphany went upstairs with Mary Machin. She lay down upon a sofa near the window, submitting apathetically to the application of such simple remedies as chanced to be at

hand: cold compresses, a soothing gargle. When she opened her lips to speak, Machie laid her fingers upon them, enjoining strict silence.

"You are not to speak a word, not one. Here is a pencil and a sheet of paper. If you want anything, write it down."

Téphany took the sheet and wrote:

"If you love me, Machie, don't fuss! I want to lie here alone and watch the storm."

Very reluctantly, Miss Machin went downstairs. Téphany looked out of the window at the familiar landscape, now blurred and distorted almost beyond recognition by wind and rain. For with the rain came the wind: passionate gusts which tore the leaves from the trees and whipped into creamy foam the dark waters of the Aven.

But the lightning had lightened indeed the intolerable heaviness of the atmosphere. Out of the hurly-burly of the storm floated a message to Téphany. It came, like the articulate note of a flute soaring above the blare of wind instruments and the roar of drums. At that moment, the lowest and highest in her became connected, as it were, by some magical chain. She could pass from one to the other, analysing each with a detachment of self hitherto unachievable. From her new point of view, her ambition to become a world-conquering singer dwindled into inconceivably mean proportions, a thing so ephemeral as to be of no more account than

the bloom upon a peach or the glittering dust upon a butterfly's wing. What had mattered, the thing which now assumed proportions so vast as to obscure aught else, was the stupendous realisation of her failure as a woman.

It became clear that her transgression towards Michael was amazingly similar to Michael's sin against Liczenn. He had taken deliberately—his own word—all that the girl could offer, giving nothing in return. And she, deliberately also, had exacted all that was left to him after shipwreck, boasting, as she did it, that it was the carefully-considered act of a mature woman, and yet, when he most needed her, she had failed him. She saw again the despair in his eyes as he turned slowly from her to leave the studio.

CHAPTER XVIII

INTERPRETATION

Sorrow gives the accolade.

PRESENTLY Père Narcisse arrived, very wet, but making nothing of that. In his pocket he carried a small case containing the sacred oils. Mary Machin, in the presence of Sir Japhet, informed the curé of what had taken place.

“The man must be mad.”

“He is not mad now,” said Sir Japhet.

Père Narcisse nodded and went into Téphany’s room. Sir Japhet took his leave, promising to return in the afternoon. At parting he gave to Machie the draught which he had prescribed and prepared for Téphany.

“It is a mild opiate,” he explained. “It may not act, but if it does, on no account awake her.”

Téphany swallowed the opiate, believing it to be a soothing mixture for her throat. Then she wrote on the sheet of paper: “Has Furic spoken?” Mary Machin sat down, shaking her head, wondering whether the sorely-needed sleep would come to her friend. She took Téphany’s hand and stroked it

gently. When Téphany's eyes closed, when her breathing became slower and more even, Machie drew from the bosom of her dress a letter: Johnnie's first letter to her, which Fantec had brought from Pont-Aven.

"DEAREST MOLL" (it began): "I am taking what is left of poor Clinton to Rochefort en Terre. We are just leaving. He talks of going home to California. I shall stay with him at Rochefort for a few days, and then return to you at Pont-Aven, or wherever else you may be. Clinton has told me everything. If I have ever wished—and I have often—to be other than the all sorts of a duffer that I am, that wish has been wiped out. When I think of Ossory, and Clinton, and Miss Lane, I am thankful that I am only

"Your loving JOHNNIE."

From this it was plain that Johnnie knew nothing of what had passed at Ros Braz. Machie made certain that Téphany was really asleep; then she kissed the letter, and stole downstairs, blushing.

By this time the storm had spent itself, and the sun was playing hide-and-seek with the scattered clouds. The smell of wet earth filled the house with its subtle sweetness. The river, the road, the trees in the garden sparkled with an immaculate freshness, with an eloquence louder than any *Benedicite*. All that was unclean seemed to Mary Machin to be lying mute in the room adjoining the pretty salon.

Presently Machie heard a word, repeated slowly, again and again.

“Liczenn—Liczenn !”

At first Mary Machin did not apprehend the significance of this name upon the lips of Furic. Then suddenly she realised, with overwhelming amazement, that the dying man must have known Liczenn, that doubtless his seizure was due to his recognition of the mask. And he was a Morbihan man. He might have been the brother, possibly the lover, of the dead girl—

She went to the *armoire*, unlocked it, and took from it the mask, which shone opaquely white out of the shadows. For a moment she regarded it attentively; then she crossed to the door of the bedroom and opened it. Père Narcisse was kneeling by the bed, praying. Furic moaned the name of the mask.

“Liczenn—Liczenn !”

“*Mon père*—”

The priest rose, mildly surprised.

“I must speak with you,” said Machie firmly; then she added, “There is not a moment to lose.”

Père Narcisse came into the salon.

“Has he said nothing ?”

“He gives me to understand that he has nothing to say.”

The good curé spoke reluctantly.

“Then why did he come here frightening two women out of their lives ?”

"I understood he was intoxicated, Mademoiselle," the priest suggested.

"And now he calls for—Liczenn ?"

"Yes."

"Then take this to him."

She placed the mask in the priest's hands. He glanced at it keenly.

"This mask was hanging above the bed when Furic entered that room. He came here to rob or to kill ; but the sight of the mask made him fall down. Miss Lane thinks the mask saved her life."

"I do not quite understand."

"The face looked alive. When I saw it I tell you that I, too, nearly fell down. But I locked it up before the others came, and forgot about it till now."

"Yes; this is important ; but I am still, if not in the dark, at least in the twilight."

"I see," said Machie.

"Exactly, and I don't."

It was then that Machie made up her mind to break her word for the sake of the woman to whom she had pledged it. Neither doctor nor priest knew aught of Michael Ossory's connection with the mask. Machie recited the facts tersely and lucidly. It will be remembered that she had always claimed to be clever in layers. Gradually Père Narcisse's fine, massive features indicated apprehension and sympathy. When she had finished, he said abruptly :

"Thank you. It took courage to tell that

story, but you may have done a greater thing than you think."

He passed through the door, shut it, and locked it. Machie heard the sharp click of the key. She had won the good curé's respect, even admiration ; but she was a heretic, without the pale. Her expressive face was twisted with dismay. Then she went to the window, wiping her forehead, feeling uncomfortably warm. The fresh air acted as a tonic. Having done so much, she asked herself if it was possible to do more. Her fine eyes sparkled as she went to the writing-table and scribbled a note. Fortunately, Bourhis could ride a bicycle, and already had rattled twice to Pont-Aven to procure medicine. To him Machie delivered her note and peremptory instructions.

" You will find Monsieur Ossory, wherever he is, and give him this."

" Perfectly, Mademoiselle."

The cook, knowing that Furic was dying, crossed herself, because horror had been in the air, and Mademoiselle's smile was positively uncanny. Machie crept upstairs, unable to sit still, and peered into the room where Téphany lay, still sleeping. Then she returned to the salon, found her work-basket, and took out her work : a half-finished silk tie, which she was knitting for her Johnnie.

In the next room there was silence. The minutes passed as Machie's needles clicked. Was a soul passing with them—unshrive?

After what seemed an interminable silence, her ear caught a mumble, and following that the deep murmur of the priest. And then again silence, and the clink of glass against glass. Evidently a stimulant had been needed. Furic's voice was heard again, louder, clearer. Machie rose irresolutely, put down her knitting, and listened. If Furic was speaking under the seal of the confessional, he would speak in vain so far as Téphany was concerned. For the moment this quiet, amiable gentlewoman looked positively savage. Standing near the door, frowning, her ear caught a sharp cry, followed by the inarticulate mumble of the priest. Then she heard Furic's voice, hard and broken in tone, but apparently still strong. Machie set her teeth as temptation ravished her. It is humiliating to record that she did not struggle. Very furtively, this honourable lady crept to the closed door, knelt down, as if she were about to say her prayers, murmured "God forgive me!" and laid her ear to the keyhole. When she rose a minute later, her face was scarlet with exasperation, not shame. She heard Furic's voice distinctly, but the man was speaking Breton. . . .

An hour later, Père Narcisse came out of the room, carrying the mask in his hand. From his face, Machie divined the truth.

"He is dead?"

"Yes. May God rest his soul."

"Amen," replied Mary.

"You can send for the women. I must see Monsieur Ossory at once, so—"

He held out his hand.

"I am expecting him any minute," said Machie. "I thought he might be wanted."

"You are wonderful."

"It is true; I am amazed at myself." She laid a trembling hand upon the sleeve of the soutane.

"I tried to overhear Furic's confession. Do you understand? It was shameful, but I did it for her sake," she glanced upwards, "and"—her pleasant voice grew defiant—"and I would do it again and again."

"Then you heard—"

"A language I did not understand," said Miss Machin. "I had to tell you, that's all."

Père Narcisse allowed a discreet smile to flicker across his impassive face.

"I understand," he said gravely. "Well, you are a friend worth having, Mademoiselle. *A propos*, if Monsieur Ossory comes here, matters will be simplified and time saved."

"Why?"

"It will be better to say what must be said before him and Miss Lane together."

"Much better, I'm sure."

"Why are you sure?" he demanded sharply.

"Because I am a woman."

Machie went on to say that Téphany had taken a slight opiate, and was still asleep. She finished characteristically, with the slight

defiance which never failed to amuse her friends and annoy her unfriends:

"Sir Japhet told me not to wake her, but I shall do so."

"For the same reason you gave me just now?"

"For precisely the same reason."

Père Narcisse bowed, and passed into the garden, where Machie could see him walking up and down, reading his breviary. Mère Pouldour performed the last office for the dead, and still Téphany slept quietly upstairs, and Machie watched the gate, wondering whether Michael would fail her. When, at length, she saw him turn the corner, she burst into tears.

Père Narcisse met the man, while Machie ran upstairs to prepare the woman. To her relief, for Sir Japhet's instructions had been very emphatic, Téphany was awake. Had the presence of Michael wakened her? In her eyes was a question; upon her lips one word trembled:

"Furic?"

Machie knelt down, knowing that Téphany could see the tears in her eyes.

"Don't speak," she entreated. "Furic is dead, and Michael is here. Père Narcisse will tell you and him the truth."

"Why has Michael come?"

"Shush-h-h! I sent for him—"

"You let him think that I wanted him,"

"No, I let him think that I wanted him. I hear them coming upstairs,"

She got up to open the door. Père Narcisse entered first. As he crossed the threshold, his lips murmured the customary prayer. Was not Téphany sick indeed both in mind and body? Michael followed, gaunt and haggard. Machie was about to leave the room when Téphany signed to her to remain.

"I have come here under protest," said Michael.

Mary Machin noted that his glance fell first upon Téphany, who never moved nor looked up.

"I assume all responsibility," said the priest.

Michael moved near to the window; Père Narcisse seated himself in the chair close to the sofa; Mary Machin stood in the centre of the room.

"Before Furic died," said Père Narcisse, "I pledged myself that his confession should be told to you." He looked first at Michael and then at Téphany. Each remained silent. "It was *his* wish at the last." Then he continued slowly: "Furic was the lover of Liczenn."

"What?" exclaimed Michael.

The priest held up his strong peasant's hand.

"He was doing his service when you came to Port Naval," he continued, "and he returned after you had left. You must have known that such a girl as Liczenn had lovers?" Michael nodded. "And it seems that Furic was the one she had encouraged till you came. Then, no doubt, she forgot all about him.

Liczenn persuaded Furic to take her to Paris. She gave no reasons, but she persuaded him to do it. If he refused, she swore that she would never speak to him again. He consented. They travelled together to Auteuil, and went to a small inn known to Furic. Next day, Liczenn went alone to Paris."

He paused, looking at Michael, as if expectant that he would fill up the gap in the narrative.

"She came to me," said Michael.

"I have been told what passed between you. The poor child loved you; you cared nothing for her, and then——"

"She threw herself into the river," concluded Michael.

"No; you are wrong."

"What do you mean?"

"She was killed by Furic," said the priest. He continued speaking in an impressive monotone, as if he were automatically delivering a message from the dead to the living. "When she left your studio, Monsieur, she returned to Furic, and asked him to take her back to Port Naval. Then—we must fill in the details—bit by bit, word by word, he dragged the truth out of her. She told him of the posing, and gloried in it. She had done it not for money, but for love. Furic listened, mad with unreasoning rage. When his bitter words burst from him, she taunted him, confessed that she had used him, befooled him, that he was less to her than the dust on her shoe. Lacerated

herself, is it likely that she would deal gently with another? No. It seems they were standing on the high road, close to a point where the ground falls sharply away to the bank of the Seine. In the struggle that ensued, Furic pushed her, consciously or unconsciously, over the bank. She fell upon some stones, striking the back of her head. Furic says she was quite dead when he reached her—dead and smiling. He tried every means he could think of to restore her; then, terrified at what he had done, he threw the body into the Seine."

Michael gazed steadfastly at Téphany, but made no sign. He looked round, feeling that his strength was leaving him. Mary Machin, divining his weakness, silently pushed a chair near him, into which he sank.

"And then—" said Téphany hoarsely.

"Furic escaped, engaged himself at Paimpol for the cod-fishing in Iceland. But he tells me that he was haunted by Liczenn, and I"—the priest raised his voice—"I, who have done what I could to destroy the superstitions of my people, I do not dare to say that he was not haunted, because, not satisfied with the horror he had wrought, the man swore vengeance upon you."

He turned to Michael.

"Why not?" said Michael. "What stayed his hand?"

"He knew your name, and it seems that he had seen some sketch, a portrait-panel painted

by a brother artist at Port Navalo. He searched for you everywhere, but he never found you till he sailed from Belle-Isle in the tunny-boat. Next day he engaged himself as a model. Then he paid a pilgrimage to Saint Yves-de-la-Vérité. That medal, according to the current belief at Trédarzec, would bring death to the person who picked it up, if that person deserved death ; otherwise death would claim the avenger."

"And death has," whispered Mary Machin.

"You picked up the medal," continued Père Narcisse.

"Yes," said Téphany.

"Furic thought that the saint had indicated to him a more subtle revenge than that he had contemplated. Through Monsieur Ossory he believed he had lost a wife. It would be only justice, he reckoned, that through him Monsieur Ossory should be deprived of a wife also."

Téphany began to tremble again.

"The man, of course, was partially insane ; I cannot doubt that. Last night he would have killed you, if it had not been for the mask. Mademoiselle"—he spoke with deep feeling—"you have escaped by what I regard as little less than a miracle. Monsieur," he turned to Michael, "speaking as a priest, I would say that God has seen fit to take a great burden from you. Your sin was grievous, my son ; but our blessed Lord is merciful. I say to you—begin again."

Michael took his outstretched hand, but he muttered : "It is too late, my father."

"It is never too late," said the priest gently.

"Your story makes no difference; I have wrecked two lives instead of one."

"Then see to it that you do not wreck a third," he whispered. Mary Machin heard him, smiled, and followed the square, massive figure out of the room.

Michael and Téphany were left alone. At once Michael crossed the room.

"Don't speak!" he entreated. "I am going, Téphany. Do you think that I do not understand? If I loved you less, I might be mistaken. You could have forgiven me anything except the detestable meanness of accepting all from that child and giving nothing in return."

"Fetch—the—mask," said Téphany. Her throat was becoming so intensely painful that the utterance of each word gave her severe pain. Michael stared at her, questioningly, but without speaking, obeying a gesture of her hand. Outside he met Mary Machin.

"You are not leaving her?" gasped Machie.

"She asks for the mask."

"Oh! I'll fetch it. Wait here!" She hurried off, leaving Michael at the head of the stairs. When she came back, as she placed the cast in his hands, she said warningly : "You mustn't let her talk."

"She is very hoarse."

"All the good of the past two months has

been undone. Sir Japhet thinks that she will never sing again in public, but——”

“Well?”

“She won’t mind that, if she can sing in private to the man she loves.”

Then Mary Machin hurried downstairs. Michael went back into the room.

Téphany held out her hands to receive the mask. When she grasped it Michael went to the window.

The sun had finally asserted his dominion over the now fast vanishing clouds. Upon the rocks near the landing tiny pools of water reflected the pale blue tints of the sky, deepening every minute into a purer azure. Some of the children of the hamlet, kept prisoners by the storm and frightened out of their wits by the thunder, were standing near the pools. Michael could hear innocent peals of laughter, the louder and gladder because the terrible storm had rolled roaring away, leaving them behind to live and laugh.

Michael saw and heard the children, apprehending their message to him; reading also the writing upon the rain-washed woods and fields, upon the river as it flowed to the sea, upon the skies so exquisitely tender in tone and texture.

Would it have been better for him and Téphany if Furic had killed him?

Why had he been spared?

Téphany lay staring at the mask which had

saved her life. And at first she thought of Furic, of Furic, who now knew. But for the moment she pictured him alive, not dead. She saw him amid the salt, grey mists of the Northern Atlantic, as he stood by the wheel at midnight, peering into the waste of waters, searching for the face that she held in her hands. Had he not sought for it a thousand times ? Or, just before dawn, that mysterious twilight hour when errant spirits flit from the darkness of night and are lost in the radiance of day, had not Furic awaited the spirit of her he had loved and slain ? Aye, with throbbing pulses and bursting heart. Or again, in his own country of Morbihan, returning after long years to the hamlet where she and he had played together on the sands, to the cool, dewy lanes wherein they had wandered, to the Calvaries upon whose granite steps they had prayed side by side—had not Furic known with ever-increasing conviction that sooner or later Liczenn would come back ? Expecting to see her uneasy spirit for ten dreary years, she had not revealed herself. But he had heard her voice : the wail of the doomed creature condemned to linger upon the earth although not of it. The roaring gales had not drowned her cry : it vibrated above the tempest even as it had moaned in the pine-tops, or sighed across a summer sea.

And at the last he had seen what he believed to be the flesh-and-blood woman which was only a face of clay.

Was it nothing more?

As she put the question, the mask appeared to answer it. What had provoked and defied interpretation vanished. Derision, protest, pain, malice, seemed to melt into an expression not be mistaken.

“Michael!”

She whispered his name, but he came as if at the summons of a clarion. What he saw in her eyes made him kneel down. Holding the mask in one hand, she placed the other about his neck, drawing his ear close to her lips. Then she murmured:

“I have read the message on her face.”

“What is it, Téphany?”

“Forgiveness for all of us.”

THE END.

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